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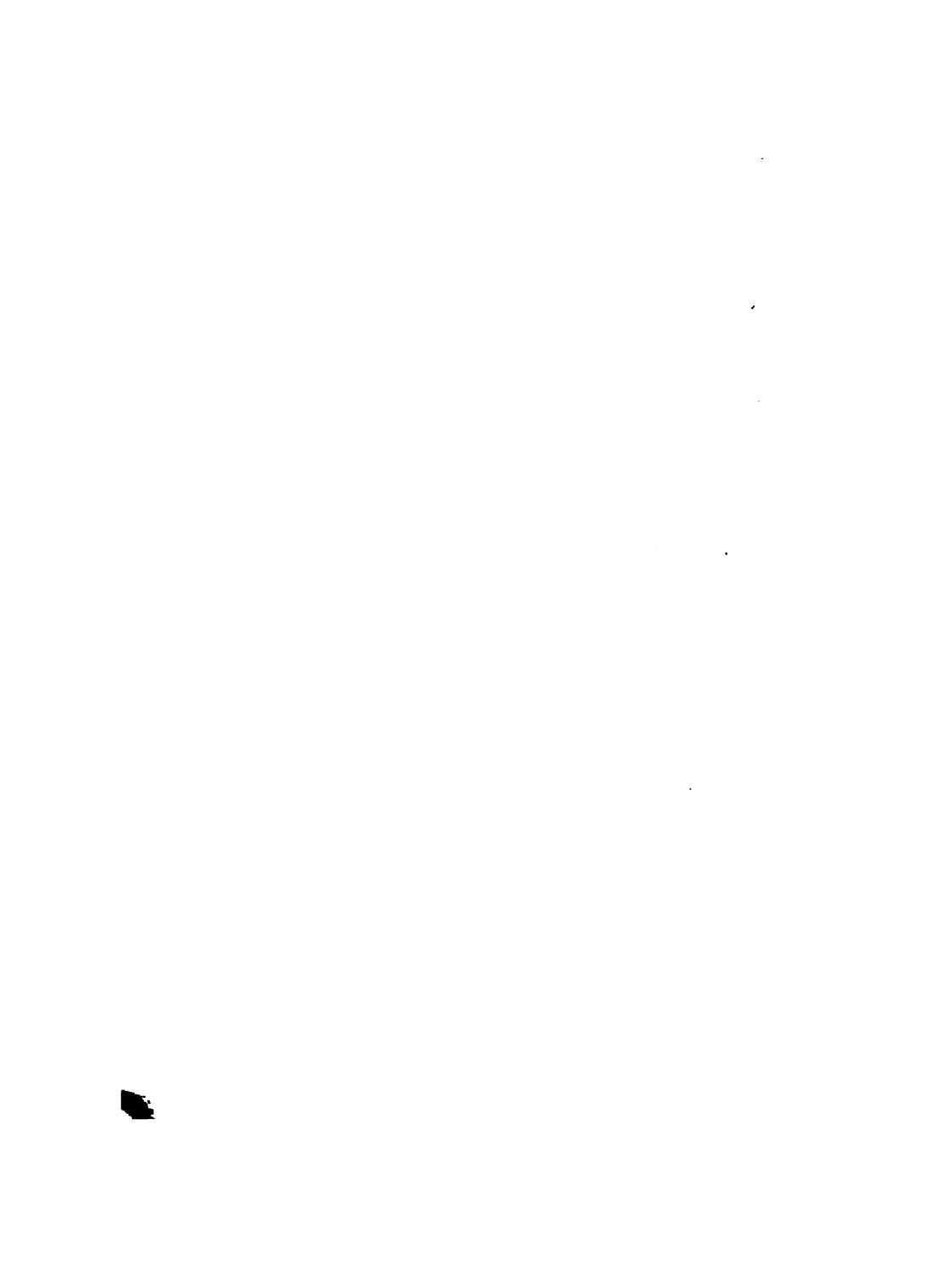


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THE LADY OF CASTLE QUEER

THE LADY OF CASTLE QUEER

BY

DAVID SKAATS FOSTER

V.C.

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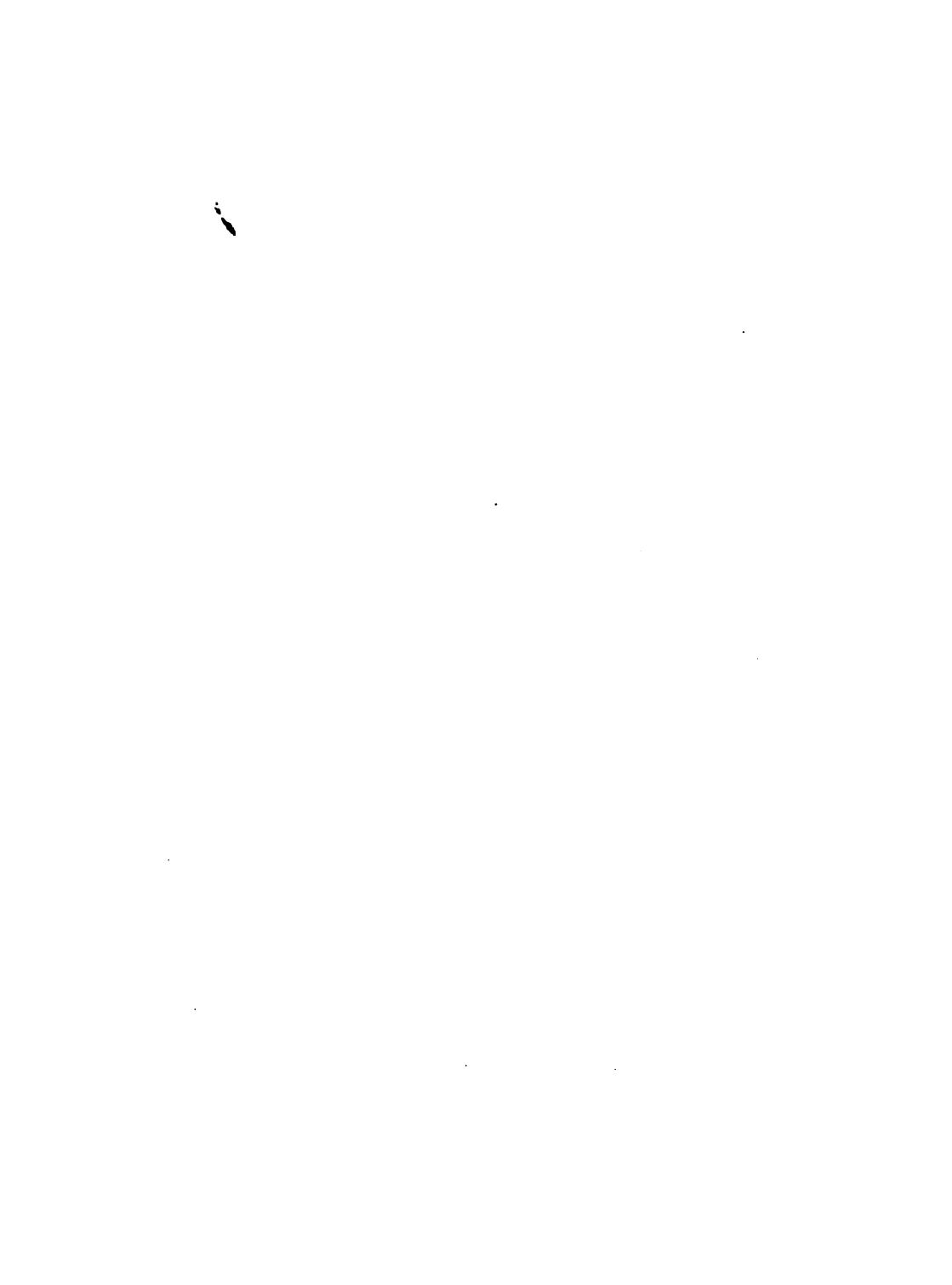
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By DAVID SKAATS FOSTER

THE ROAD TO LONDON
THE DIVIDED MEDAL
OUR UNCLE WILLIAM
THE KIDNAPPED DAMOZEL
FLIGHTY ARETHUSA
SPANISH CASTLES BY THE RHINE
THE BENEVOLENT BANDITS
MADEMOISELLE OF CAMBRAI
THE LADY OF CASTLE QUEER
REBECCA THE WITCH (POEMS)

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE CASTLE ON THE CLIFFS.....	9
II.	JOE AND GYP SCORE.....	19
III.	JOE MEETS MR. BLACKSTONE.....	30
IV.	REGARDING MR. CHRISTOPHER VAN ZANT.	45
V.	ABOUT AEROPLANES	56
VI.	WHY MARTHA LEFT.....	68
VII.	THE LADY REAPPEARS.....	80
VIII.	SECRET PASSAGES	92
IX.	THE DANCING GIRL.....	107
X.	ABOUT DRESS-MAKING	118
XI.	WITHOUT A NAME.....	132
XII.	THE ST. AGNES HOME.....	144
XIII.	THE UNLUCKY CHAPTER.....	155
XIV.	FRENCH LEAVE	166
XV.	THE MAKING OF A BOY SCOUT.....	177
XVI.	PANSY PEPPER'S PROPOSAL.....	187
XVII.	THE DOCTOR'S ASSISTANT	198
XVIII.	A MAN FOR A' THAT.....	211
XIX.	THE GREAT ADVENTURE.....	222
XX.	JOE IS DECORATED.....	233
XXI.	KIT'S QUESTION ANSWERED.....	243
XXII.	KIDNAPPED	254
XXIII.	HELIOGRAPHING	267
XXIV.	MR. BLACKSTONE POPS UP.....	279
XXV.	JOE DANCES AGAIN.....	292



The Lady of Castle Queer

CHAPTER I

THE CASTLE ON THE CLIFFS

Upon the cliffs above the Atlantic ocean on the Massachusetts shore stood a castle. It wasn't really and truly a castle such as they reared in feudal times, but it was built like one and it looked like one on a small scale, also people called it "the castle."

About five hundred feet from the ocean and parallel with it, ran a much traveled road, and the castle stood between the road and the ocean, and faced the road. The building was fully eighty feet wide and seventy feet deep. Near the right end of the front arose a big octagonal tower four stories high, with a battlemented top which was surmounted by a turret. To the left of the tower stretched a level wall, also battlemented, and in the center of the wall stood the great arched doors of the castle. To the left of the doorway stood a massive square tower which was also crenelated and turreted, and from the rear of the building arose an-

other octagonal tower which, though of less diameter and height, resembled its neighbor of the front. The building was constructed of stone and brick, the walls were half hidden with ivy, and covered in many places with a sort of gray moss or lichen which gave to them a very ancient and mediaeval look.

The castle stood in the midst of a park or estate of fifty or sixty acres which contained groves of trees and shrubbery, lawns and gardens, also several trellises or pergolas, a summer-house and a garage, the whole of these grounds being enclosed by a stone wall, six feet high. And in the wall, opposite the great stone porch of the building, there was a pair of high, ornamental iron gates which gave access to a winding driveway.

The castle had been built in the early part of the nineteenth century by a man named Josiah Blackstone, an Englishman who had come to this country with very peculiar ideas in regard to architecture and to ethics. There was an unverified legend in existence to the effect that he and his son had through long years engaged in different sorts of illicit undertakings, among which might be mentioned such trifling peccadillos as smuggling, wrecking and piracy. There may have been truth in these rumours and there may not. The fact remains, however, that their descendant, Mr. Gideon Blackstone, who owned and occupied the castle in the summer of 1917 was a man of irreproachable character.

He was a childless widower of seventy, it was said that he was a millionaire, it was certain that he was a philanthropist, and there was no doubt at all about his being a christian gentleman and a scholar. Of his great grandfather and his great, great grandfather, Josiah, he never spoke. It was evident that he was not particularly proud of these old buccaneer ancestors.

If the castle and its legends were very much out of the ordinary, so also were the cliffs which rose above the ocean, back of the castle grounds. A long time before, perhaps a million years, these cliffs had probably formed an unbroken wall against the ocean's onslaught, but a million years of hurricanes, of tidal waves and earthquakes had rent them apart, and had seamed them with deep cracks and fissures at the bottom of which the tides crashed and thundered. Great blocks of granite as big as a church had been torn away from the parent cliff, and had been plumped down into the ocean twenty, thirty or forty feet away. They were of queer and grotesque shapes, like towers round and square, some of them flat topped and others arising to sharp points and pinnacles. Two of these isolated blocks had been connected with the main cliff wall by rustic bridges, there was a summer-house here and there, and walks with protective railings were laid along the edges of the abyss. All of this work had been done by Mr. Gideon Blackstone. Many visitors, both strangers and people from the vicinity, came to look at the rugged

When he came to the sixth house on the left hand side of the street, he paused and regarded it. It was a small, frame cottage, painted white and with green blinds. A porch or verandah extended across the front of the house, the posts of which were covered with clematis and honeysuckles. Upon one of the posts there was nailed a square piece of cardboard upon which was printed in ink the following sign :

“Boy wanted, 14 or 15 years of age, to wheel invalid lady, and make himself otherwise useful.”

An invalid’s wheel chair stood upon the porch and indicated the manner in which the invalid lady was to be wheeled. After the boy had taken in the meaning of the sign and the wheel chair, he opened the gate, and entered the yard, being followed by the dog.

“You sit there!” he commanded the dog. “Don’t you stir till I come out.”

The small dog seated himself obediently just inside the gate, and looked after his master with a curious air, as if he should ask: “What in thunder is he going into that house for?”

The boy mounted the steps of the porch, and rapped loudly on the door with the brass knocker. Presently, a maid servant of thirty or thereabouts, stout, fair and of a good-natured look, came to the door. The boy pointed to the sign.

“I’d like that job,” said he, “I could do it to the Queen’s taste. What about it?”

"I don't know," answered the woman, looking at him doubtfully. "You don't look so very strong. It takes a pretty strong boy to wheel that chair, specially when you're going up hill."

"I'm stronger than I look. Just feel that muscle."

The boy doubled up his arm, and the woman felt of the muscle in question, but didn't seem to be greatly impressed by the size of it.

"I don't know," she persisted. "It would tire you awfully after you had pushed it about all morning."

"I should worry. Give me a chance and I'll show you. Why, that isn't work. That's play."

"You'd find out that it was work before you were through, and good hard work, too. You'll have to see Miss Trimbey about it, of course. I'll go in and find out if she can talk with you. I notice that you use a lot of slang. Miss Trimbey won't stand for that, now remember what I say."

"Sure thing I'll remember. I'll cut it out from now on. On the dead, that goes."

The maid servant departed and, in a minute or so, returned.

"Miss Trimbey will see you now. Be sure and be as quiet as possible, and mind your manners."

The boy followed the woman into the hallway, and through a door at the right into the parlor or sitting room. Here beside a table in an easy invalid's chair, sat a fragile old lady of sixty, or sixty-five. She had

gray hair which waved and crinkled above an intellectual forehead, her eyes were black and piercing and her pale face lightened with a kindly smile.

"What is your name, boy?" she asked.

"Joe," answered the boy who stood in a respectful attitude before her, cap in hand.

"Joe what?"

"Just Joe. That's all the name I have, never had any other."

"That's very singular. Haven't you any parents?"

"No ma'am. Never had any that I can remember. You see, I was brought up in an orphan asylum."

"Dear me, dear me, what a sad thing. I'm awfully sorry about it. To think of a child growing up without any mother. Did you just come from the orphan asylum?"

"No ma'am. Two years and a half ago I was apprenticed out to a farmer and his wife who lived about ten miles from the asylum. I left them a few weeks ago."

"Have you any recommendation from them?"

"Search me."

"What do you mean by such a ridiculous expression? Why should we search you?"

"That's just boy's slang," interposed the maid. "He means that he hasn't any."

"Joe, just remember one thing," admonished Miss Trimbey. "If I should by any chance employ you, I

can't have you using slang. I absolutely forbid it."

"Yes ma'am," answered Joe meekly.

"Why is it that you didn't get a reference from this farmer and his wife?"

"Because I ran away."

"Why did you run away? Did they maltreat you?"

"Not exactly. No, it wasn't that."

"Tell me exactly why you ran away."

Joe's inventive faculties began to work at high speed.

"It was this way, ma'am," said he finally. "This farmer and his wife where I worked were awfully stingy people and had saved up a lot of money. The farmer always kept a considerable sum of money in a small safe which stood in the dining or sitting room just off the kitchen. I slept in a small room over the kitchen. One night at about twelve o'clock, I was awakened by a noise as of something falling in the kitchen or the sitting room. I remembered that I hadn't put the cat out, so I got out of bed and went down the back stairs into the kitchen. The door from the kitchen to the sitting room was open, and I could see a funny kind of a small round light about as big as a silver dollar going up and down the walls and over the furniture of the sitting room. I went through the door and, by that time, the round disk of white had settled on the door of the safe, and I saw by the dim light a man kneeling in front of the safe. I started

backward, and stumbled over a chair, making a big racket, and at that, the man sprang up, seized me and clapped a hand over my mouth.

“‘If you let out a word, you little devil, I’ll choke you,’ he whispered. ‘You’ve spoiled my game, and I’ll have to get out of here, but mind this: If you ever tell about me, if you ever say you found me here, I’ll murder you. No matter where you go, if it’s to the other side of the world, I’ll follow you, and kill you. Do you understand?’

“I was so filled with terror that I couldn’t speak, but I managed to nod my head. With that he let me go, went to an open window, and slipped out of it.

“I knew who the man was, the light which he carried was one of those electric pocket flash lights, he had laid it on the safe when he sprang for me, and it lay in such a way that it showed me his face for an instant. He was a rough character who lived in the neighborhood, and it was said that he had once been in prison. After that night, I met him frequently in the village or in the roads nearby. Each time I met him, he used to give me a frightful scowl, as if he thought that I had already told about him, or was going to tell about him. At last I became so frightened by him that I couldn’t stand it any longer, so I ran away.”

CHAPTER II

JOE AND GYP SCORE

"Dear me, what an awful experience!" exclaimed Miss Trimbey, shiveringly. "I am very sorry that you had to go through such a trial, Joe. It must have been frightful for a boy like you. Where do these people live, this farmer and his wife, and what is their name?"

"I don't dare tell you, ma'am, honestly I don't. You see if I told you where they were and what they were, it would really be informing upon the burglar, and somehow I feel that he would follow me and find me out, if I did."

"I see what you mean, Joe, and I won't question you any further about it. I really am in quite a quandary. I have never employed any one yet, unless he or she had good references, and you are totally without anything of the kind."

"But, Miss Trimbey," interposed the maid servant, "there was Henry Briggs, the last boy we had. He had the very best kind of references, yet he lied from morning to night, and stole everything he could lay his hands on. If you had kept him, he would have stolen you poor."

"That may be, Susan. He was an exception to the rule. How he obtained those references I can't understand. Nevertheless, it is very unwise to employ people who have no recommendations."

"But Joe seems to be such a nice boy, and he has such a handsome, pleasant face. I'm sure that he wouldn't turn out like Henry Briggs."

"Susan Babbitt, I wish that you wouldn't interfere in this matter. I can manage it without your help, and when I want your advice, I'll ask for it. Besides, you must recollect that handsome is as handsome does. Joe may be a pretty boy enough, but he may be untruthful and he may be dishonest. How about that, Joe, do you ever tell untruths?"

"No ma'am," answered Joe, modestly.

"Have you ever stolen anything?"

"Just once," said the boy, after a moment's reflection.

"What, you own up that you have stolen? What was it, and when was it? Tell me exactly all about it."

"It was this scout's suit that I am wearing. I took it away from half a dozen boys."

"How could you take one suit from six boys?"

"I took a coat from one, a vest from another, a hat from another, and so on. I thought that it wouldn't be felt so much as if I took a whole suit from one boy."

"It was very wrong of you Joe."

"Of course it was, ma'am, but really, I couldn't

help it. I had to have them. If I hadn't taken them I wouldn't have had anything."

"Do you mean to say, ahem, do you mean to say that, if you hadn't taken these articles of wearing apparel, you would have been—ahem—reduced to a state of nature?"

"Yes, ma'am, that's it exactly," answered Joe, blushing. "Besides, I didn't mean to steal the clothes. I meant simply to borrow them. Just as soon as I have saved money enough, I am going to buy a new suit, and send these things back to the boys I took them from."

"That is a very laudable intention, and will go far toward setting you right in the sight of Heaven, though you can never really obliterate the memory of such a misdeed. I have been thinking, Joe, that I might possibly give you a trial. Are you sure that you are strong enough for the task? Henry Briggs was a much stockier, stronger boy than you, but he used to puff and blow frightfully when we were going up hill. I used to make him stop and rest frequently."

"Oh, you needn't bother about that, ma'am, I'm a good deal stronger than I look. I never saw Henry Briggs, but I'll bet that if we got right down to cases, I'd make him look like a two-spot."

"There you go again with your slang, Joe. I'm afraid that you're incorrigible."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, it slipped out without my thinking. I'll try hard from now on to cut it out."

"I don't know exactly what to do. You are quite slender, and you don't look very rugged. You seem quite pale, too. By the by, have you had your breakfast this morning?"

"No ma'am."

"Dear me! Susan, did you hear that? This boy hasn't had any breakfast. Joe, when did you eat last?"

"Yesterday noon."

"Mercy sakes alive! And here I've been keeping you standing and talking all this while. Susan Bab-bitt, take Joe into the kitchen at once, and give him the best breakfast you can serve. Hurry now, the boy must be almost starved to death. After he has eaten all he can hold, bring him back here again."

Susan took Joe's hand and led him out into the hall and back into the kitchen. Having first asked and obtained permission, Joe went to the sink and scrubbed his hands well with soap and water. Then he washed his face and neck vigorously and dried them. After which he smoothed out his hair, and took the seat at the kitchen table which Susan had placed for him. Susan regarded him with wonder. She had never seen a boy do these things before, unless he had been compelled to it.

Susan hustled about and before she was through placed upon the table a pile of all kinds of food sufficient for six boys the size of Joe. Suddenly, she bent down, put an arm around the boy's neck and kissed him upon

the cheek. Joe put his hand on hers and squeezed it, and his eyes seemed to fill with tears. Susan almost blubbered outright, but she hastened away and bustled about the kitchen in order to hide her feelings.

Notwithstanding that Joe, according to his tale, had fasted since the noon before, he ate rather sparingly. Also, his table manners were all that might be desired even in the most exclusive circles. Susan regarded him curiously, and a faint tinge of suspicion as to his exact status in society entered her mind.

When he had finished, and had carefully folded his napkin, Susan again took him into the parlor.

"Did you give him a good breakfast, Susan?" asked Miss Trimbey.

"Yes, I did, but he didn't eat so very much after all."

"I ate a lot," maintained Joe, stoutly. "It was awfully good, too, the best I've had since I can recollect."

"I've been thinking the matter over, Joe," said Miss Trimbey, "and I've concluded to try you for a while, anyway. I'll give you four dollars a week and your board, if you're satisfactory, and you'll sleep in the garage. I'll let you take me down town now, as I wish to call at the post-office, and buy some things at the stores. Susan, get the wheel chair."

"I'll get it," exclaimed Joe, with alacrity.

He went out into the hall and upon the porch, and wheeled the chair into the parlor. He and Susan lifted

Miss Trimbey to her feet, Joe brought the chair behind her, and the two lowered her gently into it. Joe then wheeled her out upon the porch, and he and the girl carefully let the wheel chair down, step by step to the walk. Joe had been extremely gentle and careful in his handling of the affair, and it was plainly to be seen that the invalid was appreciative of the fact.

“What’s that dog doing there?” asked Miss Trimbey, pointing to the fox terrier, which was sitting patiently by the gate in the exact spot where his master had commanded him to sit.

“That’s my dog,” answered Joe.

“Good Gracious! Do you mean to say that you have brought a dog with you, and that you expect I will let you keep him?”

“Yes, ma’am,” answered Joe, humbly and deprecatingly.

“Well, you can’t do anything of the kind. I never had a dog in my house, and I don’t like dogs. You must get rid of him at once.”

Joe made some kind of a surreptitious signal to the dog, who immediately sat up and begged.

“What’s he doing that for?” asked Miss Trimbey, complainingly. “Who told him to do that. Did you tell him, Joe?”

“No ma’am, I didn’t say a thing to him. I suppose he’s asking you to let me keep him.”

“It’s a trick. You both are in league together.

You know I have a soft heart, and you're trying to impose on me. It's no use though. I cannot and will not permit you to keep that dog. He may be a nice enough little dog otherwise, but he'd be sure to bark and frighten my cat, Spookums, and fight with him and frighten him to death. I've had that cat now for fourteen years, there hasn't been a rat or mouse in the house since he came to me a kitten, and he's worth a thousand dogs."

Just then the house door which stood ajar was pushed open, and a large black cat came out upon the porch. The moment he perceived the fox terrier, his back arched, his hair bristled and his tail developed to an enormous size. He walked purposefully down the steps and toward the dog, all the time growling wickedly, until he had got within three feet of him. After gazing at him for a long moment with a baleful glance, he sprang into the air and fetched the dog a clip on the ear with his claws. The little dog gave a yelp of pain, but made no move to retaliate.

Spookums now stood and looked at the dog curiously, as if he was a species altogether new to his experience. His tail waved this way and that, and his head was inclined to one side, as if he were studying the matter and making up his mind. Presently he went close to the fox terrier, reached up and patted him on the nose with a velvet and clawless paw, as if giving him the accolade of friendship. After which, he lay

down on his back, rolled this way and that, and began to purr with great contentment.

"Well, I never saw anything like that," exclaimed Miss Trimbey. "I never believed it possible that Spookums should make friends with a dog. What's your dog's name?"

"Gyp," answered the boy.

"Gyp, come here!" commanded the old lady.

Gyp came obediently to the side of the wheel chair. Miss Trimbey patted his head, and he essayed to lick her fingers, but she wouldn't let him.

"Good little doggie, nice little doggie," said she. "He seems to be lame, what makes him limp like that?"

"He was hit by an automobile and his leg was broken. I set the bones and bandaged his leg up. That was five or six weeks ago. Yesterday I took off the splints and bandages for the first time."

"Well I would just like to know when and where you learned to set a broken limb."

"I worked for a doctor for two weeks a short time ago. One day a boy was brought to the doctor's office with a broken arm. I was the only one about except the doctor, so I ran here and there and brought the things as the doctor told me, and held them ready while the doctor worked. It's really quite an easy thing when you once see it done. It was shortly after I had left the doctor, that I ran across Gyp, and saw him run over. He wasn't my dog at all, but after I had

fixed him up, he persisted in following me, and I couldn't get rid of him at all."

"Wait a moment, Joe, why was it that you left the doctor's employ?"

"I can't tell, ma'am," answered Joe, hanging his head. "But really, ma'am, it wasn't truly any of my fault."

"You are a very mysterious boy," said Miss Trimbley, "and I can't make you out at all. I feel all the time that you are keeping something back, and some day I'm going to have you tell me all about it. You are certainly a very smart and ingenious boy, and you showed that you have a kind disposition by taking care of that poor little dog. I don't know but I'll let you keep him after all. He and Spookums act as if they were going to be good friends. Susan, take Gyp back to the garage and lock him up. When I come back, we will arrange for some kind of a box or kennel for him."

Susan picked Gyp up in her arms, and went around the house to the garage.

"And Susan," called Miss Trimbley after her. "Give him that bone that was left from breakfast. No, don't do that, either. Meat isn't good for small animals. Make him some porridge with corn starch and milk, the same as you make for Spookums."

"Oh, Miss Trimbley," exclaimed Joe, "I thank you ever so much for letting me keep Gyp. I'll see that

he doesn't make you any trouble at all. And then he eats ever so little, and it would only be what you would throw away. Besides, I wouldn't know what to do with him if I had to get rid of him. It would be so hard to get him a home. No one wants a lame dog. You are awfully, awfully good."

"Nonsense, nonsense, Joe. It's all right as long as he and Spookums have made friends. It isn't doing half as much for Gyp as you did when you set his broken leg and cured him. When I heard of that I couldn't help keeping him. By the by, why didn't you tell me of your working for that physician? I thought you came straight here from the farmer's house."

"Oh, no, ma'am, I left the farmer's several weeks ago. Since then I have traveled about the country a good bit, and had a lot of ups and downs. I also worked ten days or so for a groceryman at Peterboro."

"And I suppose," remarked Miss Trimble sarcastically, "that you also object to telling me why you left the grocerman's."

"Oh, no, ma'am. Of course I'll tell you. You see I had to take the groceries and other things to the customers' houses in a basket. I had to go into the kitchens. There were always one or more girls in the kitchen, some young and pretty and some old and ugly. Whatever they were, they all, or most all of them would get familiar with me. They pinched my cheek, or kissed and hugged me. They called me

'pretty boy' and 'sweetheart' and lots of other names. Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer. If there's anything I hate it's to have a lot of girls slobbering over me. I made up my mind that I'd leave and get something else to do. When I told the groceryman that I was going to leave, he said my time wasn't up, and he refused to pay me the three dollars which he owed me for the week."

"Joe, you did a wise thing, and I'm glad that you knew enough to go away. I don't approve of girls and women kissing boys of fourteen and over. The naughty hussies, they should have been ashamed of themselves. At the same time, I can readily see why they should want to kiss you, as you are really an extraordinarily handsome boy. Now tell me, Joe, has Susan kissed you yet?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered Joe, blushing. She kissed me once when we were in the kitchen. I know though that she kissed me only because she had a motherly feeling for me. She's all right, all right, and I like her ever so much."

"No wonder you like her. She's the very best girl in all the world. She has been with me for fourteen years. She and Spookums came at the same time, she loves me devotedly and I couldn't live without her. Joe, you may kiss me, too, if you like."

Joe stooped and kissed Miss Trimbey on the cheek, she gave him a kind and motherly smile and, from that moment, they felt the commencement of an affection which was to last as long as they lived.

CHAPTER III

JOE MEETS MR. BLACKSTONE

Joe now pushed the wheel chair down Sumner Street to the main street, and down the Main street, to the stores, being extremely careful to avoid all rough places in the walk and to let the chair down from curb to street with the least possible jar. The poor lady had never had so easy a voyage down town, and she was filled with satisfaction over her new acquisition.

“In the first place,” said she to Joe, when they had arrived at the business part of the street, “we will stop at the clothing store. I am going to advance you the money necessary for a new suit, so that you can send your present clothing back to the boys from whom you purloined it. You can pay me back as soon as you earn the money. I don’t think that you ought to pass another night with that sin upon your conscience.”

Joe wheeled Miss Trimbey into the store. She had him measured, and picked out for him an ordinary boy’s knickerbocker suit of gray tweed with several pairs of long gray woolen stockings and a gray Scotch cap.

"This will be better than a boy scout's uniform," said she. "In the first place, you aren't a boy scout, and in the second place, I don't like to make myself so conspicuous by being wheeled about by a young man in uniform."

She now had Joe go into one of those small closets provided for the purpose, and change from his uniform to the new suit. When he came out, she inspected him from all sides, and declared that his new apparel fitted him perfectly. He certainly showed a very neat and trim little figure, and was evidently very much pleased himself, as he surveyed himself in the glass. After the storekeeper had done up the boy scout's uniform in a paper box ready for shipping, Miss Trimbey and Joe went to the express office, where Joe marked the box, and had it sent to the boy from whom he had taken the coat. When Joe had appropriated these articles of apparel, he had found in one of the pockets of the coat, a knife upon the handle of which was engraved the name of its owner. The knife now went with the coat, and also a dollar bill which Miss Trimbey had given Joe for the purpose.

Miss Trimbey now had Joe wheel her to a drug store, a dry goods store and a grocery store, in which places she bought sundry articles which were stowed at the bottom of the chair. She then had herself taken into the post-office. Joe asked the postmaster for Miss Trimbey's mail, and was given one letter which he handed to his mistress.

While she was reading it, Joe the meanwhile standing back of her with his hand upon the back of the chair, a big green, seven-passenger touring car which contained three people, drew up in front of the post-office. A chauffeur, stockily built, in cap, blue goggles and dust coat sat at the wheel, and there were two men in the tonneau. One of them was an erect, sprightly old gentlemen of seventy, clad in gray tweed coat and motoring cap, with a full white beard and sharp black eyes. The other was a gentleman of thirty or forty, he might have been either, slim but athletic, with closely set gray eyes, aquiline nose, a black moustache and a black beard which split into two parts, the kind of beard which Mephistopheles wears in most of his pictures. When he smiled, which he now did at the old gentleman, he showed a set of very large, strong, white teeth. The man was dressed faultlessly and in the height of fashion, he wore fawn-colored spats and an eye-glass dangled upon the front of his gray silk vest.

This last gentleman now alighted from the car and came into the post-office. As he passed Miss Trimbey, he touched his hat perfunctorily but gave Joe no notice whatever. He went to one of the lock boxes, opened it and drew out of it a mass of letters which he looked over carefully. Two of these he abstracted from the lot and, having given a covert glance in the direction of the automobile, he thrust these two into his pocket.

He now went out and handed the remaining letters to the old gentleman, and the car drove away.

When the young man had come into the post-office, Joe looked at him with fear distended eyes, the boy's face turned pale, he shrank away from the man, he actually trembled.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Miss Trim-bey, after the man had gone out. "Why did you stare at him so? What has frightened you? Do you know him? Have you ever seen him before?"

"Yes,—I mean no. He looked liked someone I had seen before, that's all. I was scared when I first saw him."

"Good Heavens, Joe, you don't mean that he looked like that burglar?"

"Oh no, ma'am, not at all. That burglar was a big, rough man. This man wasn't like him at all. It was foolish of me to act so. I was sort of astonished and shocked, that's all."

"Joe, there's something very queer about you. There's that burglar business, and there's some mystery about why you left the doctor's, to say nothing about the way you acted just now. I am going to have you clear it all up sometime, and that very soon. It will be for your own benefit, as you probably are in particular need of some advice. Why you should be so frightened by that man just now I can't see. That's Mr. Morel, Mr. Blackstone's secretary. That old

gentleman in the car was Mr. Blackstone. I don't see how it is possible that you could ever have seen Mr. Morel before, let alone his ever having done anything to you. I don't like the man, I think that he's a hard sort of a scheming time server, but I don't see why that should affect you. Felix Morel is certainly a snake in the grass. He came to Mr. Blackstone one or two years ago. I don't know where he originated, or how Mr. Blackstone came to get him. I have spoken to Mr. Blackstone about him more than once, but he only laughs at me. Mr. Blackstone is a high principled, generous, honorable gentleman. Like all men of his class he is as unsuspicious as a child, and thinks all men like himself."

Joe now wheeled Miss Trimbley out of the post-office and up the street toward home.

"He certainly acted as if he didn't know me," said Joe to himself. "It was strange, and he may have been putting it on, but I don't think so. Oh, I'm glad if he didn't really recognize me."

"Wait a moment," said Miss Trimbley, when they had come to the corner of her street. "I don't think that I'll go home just yet. I think that I'll have you take me first over the hill to the castle and the cliffs. Have you ever seen the castle and the cliffs, Joe?"

"No ma'am."

"I'd like to show them to you. The salt ocean air is very invigorating up there, and it always gives me an

appetite for dinner. Are you sure, Joe, that you aren't too tired to push me up the hill?"

"Tired!" snorted the boy contemptuously, "I feel just as if I hadn't done anything at all. You just watch me."

Saying this, he went ahead, and in a very short space of time, and without undue exertion, he arrived at the top of the hill.

"Joe," exclaimed the old lady, "you are a wonder. You don't even seem to be out of breath. All the boys I have had seemed to make an awful work of it. When they got to the top of the hill, they puffed and blew and wanted to rest for an unconscionable time. Perhaps, though, it was simply because they were lazy."

A quarter mile farther, they came to the wall of the castle grounds, where there was a narrow cross road or path which led to the cliffs. The walls of the castle, gray and ancient, loomed up above the trees and shrubbery.

"Well, there's the castle," announced Miss Trimbley. "What do you think of it?"

"It's some castle, all right, all right. It looks like some old robber baron's palace. It looks like the pictures I've seen in books of castles in England and Germany. Did Mr. Blackstone build it?"

"Oh, dear no. It was built by Mr. Blackstone's great, great grandfather, Josiah Blackstone, more than a hundred years ago. Folks say that Josiah and his

son Samuel were little better than pirates. I don't know whether that was true or not, and I don't care. All I know is that Gideon, the present Mr. Blackstone, is as good a man as they make 'em, and that satisfies me."

"I'd like to see the inside of it. I've never been inside of a castle."

"Some day we'll go and call on Mr. Blackstone, and ask him to show us through the building. He'll be glad to do it. I've had many a happy time there, but it was more than forty years ago. It has a lot of queerly shaped rooms, and there are big halls and winding passages and stairways going this way and that and big fire-places and deep alcoves and dark corners. Some folks say that there are secret passages and chambers in the castle, but I don't know as to that. They have it that Mr. Blackstone's great grandfather and great, great grandfather used these secret passages and rooms for their nefarious operations, and that Mr. Blackstone's own father, who was a great abolitionist, and a very good man, used them for a hiding place for runaway southern slaves, whom he was forwarding to Canada. The rooms and hallways are full of old priceless furniture and paintings and eastern rugs and tapestries and bronzes and carvings and marble statues and heathen idols and suits of armor and swords and guns and blunderbusses, and Chinese vases and antique musical instruments. The

castle is one big museum. Mr. Blackstone in his more youthful days was a great antiquarian and collector. At one time he had some Egyptian mummies there, but Amy Langford, when she married him, made him get rid of them. She said that she couldn't sleep in the house while they were there.

Just at that moment the large green touring car which had stopped at the post-office while Miss Trim-bey and Joe were there, came up the road from the village. The old gentleman gave the chauffeur an order and the car came to a standstill near Miss Trim-bey's wheel chair.

"Good morning, Althea," cried the old man, "how are you finding yourself this morning?"

"Quite well, Gideon, considering everything. I have my ups and downs, and today I'm rather up than down."

"Anyone could see that, Althea, by looking at you. You have a fine color in your face, and you look very fresh and lively. You seem younger than when I saw you last. I really think that you are growing younger instead of older."

"Nonsense and fiddlesticks, Gideon. That's the way you used to talk forty years ago, and you haven't improved any. There's no need for me to enquire about your health. Anyone can see at a glance that you're the same, wiry, stout, young old man that you were ten years ago."

"You forget my rheumatism, Althea."

"It's a good thing that you have a twinge of rheumatism now and then, if it only makes you realize that you're mortal like the rest of us."

"I see that you have a new boy, Althea. He's a handsome little chap. I hope he will prove as good as he looks. What's his name?"

"His name is Joe."

"Joe, come here," commanded Mr. Blackstone.

Joe obediently went over to the car. Mr. Blackstone thrust his hand into his pocket, pulled out a silver dollar and gave it to the boy.

"Thank you very much, sir," said Joe.

"Now my boy," cautioned the old gentleman, "you must spend that money wisely. Don't buy cigarettes or play pool with it."

"I don't smoke, and I don't know how to play pool."

"That's right. If you spend that money well, and if you are a good lad, there will be more dollars coming from the same place."

Saying this, Mr. Blackstone lifted his hat in a courtly salutation to Miss Trimbley, and the car passed on.

"Isn't he the best and finest gentleman that ever lived?" asked Miss Trimbley.

"Surest thing you know," answered Joe. "He's all wool and a yard wide."

"He and I and Amy Langford, the girl he married,

were boy and girl friends more than forty years ago. We were constantly together. I may have been a little jealous when he married Amy, but if I was, I soon got over it. Their happiness didn't last long. They had been married two years. They were giving a fancy dress ball. I had just entered the castle and I saw Amy standing at the head of the great broad central stairway of the reception hall. She was dressed in a tightly fitting, low-necked and short-sleeved violet silk bodice and a short hooped skirt flounced from the hem to the waist. As she started to come down the stairs, her high heels caught on the edge of the steps and she fell headlong. Her skull was fractured and she died that night. She left a baby girl a year old. That girl grew to be a very beautiful, intelligent, accomplished young lady, but when she was eighteen years old, she ran away with an actor, a worthless scamp, and her father never heard from her again, though he sought her everywhere for years. Gideon Blackstone never married again, though he could have had any girl he wanted. He has been always faithful to his first love. He keeps her picture on his writing desk, and I have often seen him take it up and kiss it. So you see that Gideon Blackstone has had an exceedingly sorrowful and lonely life. I don't know why such a fine man should be singled out for such misfortunes."

"I know," declared Joe, rather callously, "it was

the mantel shelf and in a cabinet which stood in a corner of the parlor.

"I want them where I can look at them," said she. "They are exceedingly pretty, and I thank you for them very much. No boy ever thought to give me anything before."

When it came bed time that night, Susan took Joe out into the garage, to show him his sleeping quarters. It wasn't really a garage, it was only a two-storied shed, which Miss Trimbey, to keep up with the times, had given that high sounding title. Going up a pair of stairs, Susan pushed up a trap door, and she and the boy entered a small, square apartment. The walls were ceiled with boards, but not papered, it contained an iron bedstead, with a soft, comfortable mattress, one small, straight-backed chair, and one large Morris easy chair, a washstand with bowl and pitcher of water, a good-sized looking-glass, a dressing bureau and a ceiling oil lamp. The walls of the room had been almost completely covered with pictures cut from magazines and newspapers, pictures of prize-fighters and of ladies in tights predominated, and thereby showed the trend of thought of Joe's predecessors.

"You won't be afraid to stay here alone?" asked Susan.

"Of course not. I'm no girl," answered the boy with a scowl. Nevertheless, after Susan had gone down the stairs, he shut the trap, and pulled the bed-

stead over upon it. When he had undressed, he kneeled beside the bed and said his prayers, with his hands pressed together in the orthodox fashion, then he turned out the light, and jumped quickly into bed.

The next day, after dinner, Susan asked Joe if he would do her a favor.

"You bet your life I will," answered he.

"I don't want to bet my life, and I don't want you to use such language. I thought you were going to stop talking that way?"

"I am going to stop. Honest ingun, I quit right now. What you want me to do, Susan?"

"I want you to go on an errand to the castle."

Joe was taken aback. The castle was the last place he wanted to visit. He dreaded the ordeal of meeting Morel again, and yet he couldn't refuse without explaining, and it was impossible to explain.

"All right," said he at length with an effort. "I'll go. What am I to do?"

"I want you to take a note to my sister, Martha Babbitt. She's the cook there. There's no answer, so you needn't come back till five."

Susan gave Joe the note, and he set out for the castle. When he arrived at the big iron gates in the stone wall, he peered through the bars with fear and trembling. Seeing no one about, he finally screwed up courage enough to push one of the gates open and to enter the grounds. When he had advanced up the

winding driveway to the porch, and was about to turn to the right into a path which led to the rear of the building, one of the great doors of the castle swung open, and Felix Morel, the man he feared more than he feared anything else, came out upon the steps. Morel scrutinized the boy closely for a long moment, then he turned away and went off into the grounds to the left of the building. Joe gave a long sigh of relief.

"He really doesn't recognize me," thought he. "Of course he thinks I'm dead. How lucky it was that I threw him off the track! Now I needn't be afraid of him any longer."

Joe found Martha Babbitt to be a somewhat enlarged edition of her sister Susan. She was also like Susan, stout, kindly-faced and good-natured. When she had read the note, she brought the boy some cookies and a glass of milk.

"Some day when you are here and the men are away," said she, "I'll show you all about the place. You'll see things that'll make your eyes pop out."

On his way home the boy gathered a lot of wild tiger lilies which grew along the wayside, and made them into a monstrous bouquet.

"That was very thoughtful of you, Joe," said Miss Trimbley when he had presented her with the flowers. "It is many a long day since a young man gave me any flowers."

CHAPTER IV

REGARDING MR. CHRISTOPHER VAN ZANT

Some three or four weeks after the new boy had come to Miss Trimbey, a stranger, a young man of twenty-eight or thirty, arrived at the village of East Halford, and put up at the Castle Inn. He was tall and of an athletic figure, but he was rather pale and seemed somewhat nervous. He had a good, clean-shaven face, gray eyes which had a twinkle in them now and then, a rather large nose and a good-natured mouth. He came in a much used, high-powered roadster car, and he brought with him a large valise and a painter's easel and portfolio. When the grimy register was pushed across the office counter for his signature by Hiram Holloway, the stout, genial proprietor of the hotel, he wrote the name "Christopher Van Zant." He paused meditatively before registering, and he wrote the name with painstaking precision, acting altogether as if it were not his true and full name, and it wasn't.

When he ate supper at the hotel that night, he was waited upon by Miss Maud Holloway, the pretty daughter of the proprietor. There were two waitresses,

Miss Holloway and a girl named "Lizzie." Miss Holloway was tall, rosy-cheeked, black-eyed, well developed and well dressed. The other girl was plain and slatternly in her dress. Miss Holloway chose always to wait upon young and well-favored gentlemen. To Lizzie were relegated the common proletariat. Mr. Christopher Van Zant, upon his entering the dining room, was at once taken over by the particular Miss Holloway.

Getting acquainted with Miss Holloway was an easy matter when it was a question of a young and handsome gentleman. If the gentleman were coy or modest, the young lady helped things forward materially. Before his supper was half finished, Christopher found Miss Holloway sitting at his elbow and chattering away as if she had known him a month.

"Can you tell me anything about the Blackstone Castle?" he presently asked. "It's a very curious, ancient old rookery, and I'd like to know about it."

"Of course I can. I can tell you all about it. What shall I tell you?"

"Who is living there now, Miss Holloway, besides Mr. Blackstone?"

"There's Mr. Morel, his secretary, Jacob Flint, the butler and Mr. John Barry, the shofer. Mr. Barry also helps the gardener about the grounds. The gardener comes by the day and doesn't live there. Flint, the butler, is a common, rough sort of a fellow, but

Mr. Barry is a perfect gentleman. Several times he has taken me riding in Mr. Blackstone's car when Mr. Blackstone was away or not using it. I'll tell you a secret if you'll promise never to reveal it."

"When a lady tells me a secret, it goes no farther, of course."

"Mr. Barry doesn't work because he has to. Really, he belongs to a very good and wealthy family. He told me all about it. He only drives Mr. Blackstone's car for the fun of it and because he likes the excitement of it. I've been with him nights when he made that old car go sixty miles an hour."

"That must have been some joy ride."

"Mr. Van Zant, whatever do you mean? I'll have you to understand that it was not a joy ride. Also that I'm a perfect lady and wouldn't demean myself by taking joy rides."

"Pardon me, Miss Holloway, I used the expression inadvertently. I see that Mr. John Barry has succeeded in getting into the good graces of an exceedingly smart and handsome girl. Lucky man! How about the castle. Aren't there any women there at all?"

"Not now. Mr. Blackstone had a cook named Martha Babbitt and another girl who helped her, but they both left suddenly a week or so ago. Martha Babbitt works for us now. She's in the kitchen with mother at the present moment."

Boston. Sometimes they go by train from Sumner, and sometimes they go all the way in Mr. Blackstone's car. It's only forty miles you know."

"When you say they all go, do you mean Mr. Blackstone and his three men?"

"I don't think that Flint, the butler goes, but Mr. Morel and Mr. Barry always go."

"Why should they go to Boston so often?"

"How should I know? Besides what difference does it make to you? You seem to worry a lot about it. I must go now. There's a traveling man over at the table by the wall who has been waiting all of a quarter of an hour."

That night at the Strand Theatre Miss Maud Holloway was in a heaven of delight. Mr. Christopher Van Zant, it is sad to relate, was extremely bored. Before the picture of "Souls of Sorrow" was ended, he felt that he knew all about it from personal experience. On their way back to the hotel they passed a drug store which was brilliantly lighted and which contained a soda fountain.

"I see that Sessions' drug store is still open," remarked Miss Maud, guilelessly. "It's a remarkable thing, but they do say that his sundaes and sodas are better even than you'll find in some of the large cities."

"If you like," said Christopher, "we'll try his sundaes."

She did like, and they did try them.

The next morning at about ten o'clock, Mr. Van Zant got out his car, and ran it up over the hill to the castle. As he passed the castle grounds, he scrutinized closely every part of the building, the lawns and the gardens, but nowhere did he perceive a human being. He drew up his car before the great iron gates and getting out came to the gates and peered through them. No one came to the castle windows, no one was about in the grounds. The garage door was wide open and the garage was empty.

"Perhaps it is the day they go to Boston," thought he. "Did they go in their car all the way, or did they go by train from Sumner? I'll run over to Sumner and find out."

Running his car back to the village, he turned into Sumner Street, and in a quarter hour, drew up at the railway station in Sumner. A large, empty green touring car stood back of the station building.

"That's Mr. Blackstone's car, I'll bet," said he to himself.

Upon interviewing the station agent, he found that he was right in his conjecture. He also found that Mr. Blackstone, his secretary, Morel, and the chauffeur, Barry, had left on the nine-thirty train for Boston and that they usually returned on the five twenty-five.

"Why the dickens does Mr. Blackstone take his chauffeur with him?" thought Van Zant. "I can understand his taking Morel, but why the chauffeur?"

That afternoon he drove to the castle again. This time he took his car down the narrow road which led to the cliffs, and left it in an inconspicuous spot under some trees by the side of the stone fence. Swinging himself to the top of the wall, he dropped down into the castle grounds. From tree to tree and from bush to bush he went, keeping himself hidden all possible, until he had made the circuit of the building. No one appeared at any of the windows. The entire grounds were bare of living beings. There were marble statues here and there, but that was all.

"Where's the butler, Flint?" he asked himself. "Flint should be somewhere hereabouts. He didn't go with the rest."

He was standing in front of the castle in a clump of shrubbery, and he chanced to gaze upward at the third story windows of the great octagon tower. At that moment there came to his view an apparition puzzling, inexplicable and startling. To one of these windows came a very young and very handsome lady. She looked out, and it seemed to him that she nodded. In an instant she was gone, but that one moment of her stay showed him that her face was lovely, her white arms and neck bare, that she was clad in a tight-fitting waist or bodice which scarce concealed a slim and elegant figure, and that she wore a picture hat, flaring up at one side.

"Well, what do you know about that?" he asked,

lapsing into slang under the excitement of the moment. "Everyone agrees that there are no women in the castle, and here I have indisputable evidence to the contrary. I wonder if she is a captive, or whether she is there of her own free will. In either case it needs looking into. It's an astonishing thing even if she's there because she wants to be. Mr. Blackstone, if he's the man I always supposed, wouldn't think of keeping a young and beautiful girl in a house where there were four men and no women. I'm going to get at the truth of this matter. If the lady is a captive, I'm going to get her out of that musty, old place, if it's the last act of my life."

After waiting a long time fruitlessly for the reappearance of the girl at the window, he again made a circuit of the building, hoping that she would show herself at some other window. It was all in vain though, for he saw no more of her.

"I must get back to the village again," thought he, "and take the road to Sumner. It's a quarter past five already, Mr. Blackstone and his men have arrived at the Sumner station, and I want to meet them on the road."

Half way from East Halford to Sumner he did indeed meet them. At the steering wheel of the big green car sat the goggled chauffeur, Mr. Barry. In the tonneau there were two men, one of them young, black-bearded and dressed in the height of fashion, the other a man of seventy or over, a man with a full white

beard, a rather pale, emotionless, stolid face, clad in gray tweeds and a motoring cap of the same material.

Christopher drew up his car at the side of the road, and motioned with upraised hand for the green car to stop. The driver paid no attention to him, but went on with increased speed. The old man in the tonneau never once looked at Christopher, but gazed straight ahead with a vacant stare.

"That was Mr. Blackstone all right," said Christopher to himself, "but what has got into the old man? He acts as if he were doped or intoxicated, but the latter couldn't be. I have always heard that he was most abstemious. Well, we'll know all about it when we are through."

That night, Mr. Van Zant again took Miss Maud Holloway to the moving pictures at the Strand Theatre.

"This girl is getting on my nerves," thought he, as they started from the hotel. "If she didn't invite herself tonight, she came pretty near it. I foresee that I shall have no end of trouble with her. I should have shooed her away in the first place, but when one sets out to act the part of a Sherlock Holmes, one has to get information from people of both high and low degree."

The play that night was also written upon the subject of souls. This time it was "Tortured Souls," instead of "Souls of Sorrow."

"Why can't they let these poor souls have a rest?"

thought he, sadly. "Why don't they knock people who have bodies and who can hit back?"

"Oh, why couldn't I have been a motion picture actress," sighed Miss Holloway, as they walked home. "It must be heavenly. Oh, if I only had the chance!"

"A chance ought to come very easily to a girl of your handsome face and figure."

"Do you really think so, or are you making fun of me? But what should I do, how must I begin?"

"I think you begin by interviewing the managers of the moving picture studios. There must be a hundred of them in New York City alone. Better still, you might write them, and send them your photograph. When they saw your picture, if I'm any judge of such things, they would fight with each other to secure your services."

"But how will I know where to write? Where will I get their addresses?"

"I'll get a moving picture magazine tomorrow and copy their addresses for you."

The following morning, Miss Holloway ordered of her photographer four dozen of her latest photographs.

CHAPTER V

ABOUT AEROPLANES

Early upon the following afternoon, Christopher put his easel, portfolio and camp stool into his car, and drove again in the direction of the castle. Just before reaching the castle grounds, he turned off upon a cross road which ran up over the hill and which skirted the large piece of woods which stood over against the castle. When he had gone a quarter mile, he came to a little used wagon track which led into the woods. Following this track until he was well out of sight of any persons traveling the road, he left the car, and carrying his easel and other impedimenta, walked down hill through the woods. He presently came to a gully or ravine at the bottom of which a small brook leaped and splashed. Crossing the ravine he bore to the right and very soon came to a spot where the forest was thinner and where there was an opening in the foliage which gave an unobstructed view of the castle and the castle grounds.

A pair of field glasses hung by a strap from his shoulders. He leveled the glasses at the castle walls

and grounds and took a very long and exhaustive look.

"Not a sign of the fair lady today," he sighed regretfully. "Perhaps she only shows herself when the men are away. Well, here goes for Christopher Van Zant's famous painting of Blackstone Castle."

He set up his easel and camp stool, and placing his canvas in position, went to work vigorously, with the result that, in a half hour, he had completed substantially the outlines of the picture. He seemed now to lose interest in the task. Throwing down his palette and brushes, he took another long look through the field glasses, after which, stretching himself upon the mossy ground with his head against a tree, he filled and lighted a pipe, pulled a book out of his pocket and began to read.

Pretty soon there was a sharp crackling of twigs and decayed branches, and suddenly from the under-brush emerged a boy of about fourteen years and a small black and white fox terrier. The boy and dog have already been described. Joe at this time, however, carried his shoes and stockings in his hand and displayed a round, trim pair of legs. At the unexpected and disturbing sound Van Zant started, sprang to his feet and the book dropped from his hand.

"Hullo, boy!" he called out as he regained his composure.

"Hullo, man!" answered the boy.

"Where did you come from?"

“From the other end of the woods over the top of the hill. I was sitting by the waterfall.”

“Is there a waterfall?”

“Yes, a tiny little bit of a fall. I often go there. I come here, too. I like to sit on that fallen tree, and rest my back against that big upright limb.”

“Do you live about here?”

“No, I live down in the village. I work for Miss Althea Trimbey. She’s an invalid and I wheel her about in a wheel chair.”

“What’s your name?”

“My name is Joe.”

“Joe what?”

“Just Joe. I haven’t any other name. You see, I’m an orphan. I was raised in an orphan asylum. Two or three years ago, I left the asylum and went to work for a farmer and his wife who lived on the edge of a village six or seven miles from the orphanage. Something happened there and I had to light out in a hurry. After that I traveled fifty miles or so on foot, and finally fetched up at East Halford.”

“Would you mind telling me why you had to light out in such haste from the farmer’s house?”

Joe’s inventive genius again was called into use.

“I’ll tell you all about it. It was like this.”

“Hold on Joe. I’ve generally noticed that when people say they’ll tell you all about it, they don’t mean to tell you anything about it.”

"This is true, honest ingun and cross my heart. This farmer and his wife were rich, but he was awful stingy. He kept a lot of money always in a small safe which stood in the parlor, but it was hard work for his wife to get anything out of him. His wife belonged to a sort of club or society of women who met around at each other's houses and gossiped and played cards. Well, it seems that she lost a lot of money playing bridge or something. It was an awful big amount and she wasn't able to pay. What did she do then but burglarize the old man's safe, and take what she wanted. I was in the kitchen at the time, the parlor door was partly open, and I saw her do it. Her husband soon discovered his loss, and called out to his wife that he had been robbed. She was up stairs and she came rushing down the front way, and they began to have a terrible argument. They didn't know I was in the kitchen, and they talked things right out. The poor woman was in a fix, she had to put the blame on someone and she happened to think of me.

"'Joe is the only one who could have done it,'" said the farmer's wife to her husband. 'No one else has access to the parlor. You may depend upon it, he's the one.'"

"At this I stole out of the back door and hid in the barn. Very soon I saw them both come from the house and go toward the village. I said to myself, 'Joe, they're going to have you pinched.' So I made tracks

good partner, too. I was the pilot and steered the plane. I was always the pilot. Jim Ferguson dropped bombs and handled the machine gun. He came out of the smash-up without a scratch. You see I was strapped in, but he was loose and was able to jump just as the aeroplane reached the ground. I tell you what, boy, that was one strenuous day."

"Oh, tell me all about it, Mr. Van Zant. Gee whittaker! I'd rather hear about that than anything else."

"How did you know that my name was Van Zant?"

"How did I know? Why, everyone in East Hal-ford knows it by this time. That's the kind of a town it is. Every one knows that you are Mr. Christopher Van Zant."

"I didn't know that I cut such a figure in the village. Yes, that's my name, but you mustn't call me 'Mr. Van Zant.' You may call me 'Kit.' "

"But Kit's a girl's name. It doesn't seem just right to call you by such a girl's name."

"Kit is short for Christopher, you know. Some people have called me 'Chris,' but I don't like it. It sounds too much like German."

"Well, I'll call you 'Kit' but it sounds funny. Now you're going to tell me all about that last day of yours in the air. Aren't you, Kit?"

"Surest thing you know, boy. We got up early one morning and circled here and there over the battle

line, hoping that we could meet one of the Boches and bring him down. Singularly enough, we didn't find any, so we determined to go on over the enemy's camp. Then they commenced to give us their attention. Anti-air craft shrapnel, incendiary shells and what they called flaming onions came up like clouds to meet us, but we zigzagged this way and that, dived downward, soared aloft, side slipped and circled until we broke clear to the blue sky out of their range to their rear. Here we saw a Boche birdman, a mile up in the sky waiting for a chance to come down on our tail, and we made up our minds to get rid of him. To do this, down we plunged for a thousand feet or so, until we were hidden in a bank of clouds. Down the fellow came after us, and slipping through the clouds, was a thousand feet below us, before he discovered that he had been fooled. It is always an advantage to be on top. We had won this advantage, and we proposed to keep it. Up and up we both soared and circled, our machine guns spitting a continuous flame. Finally, Ferguson got his range and by a well directed burst of fire crumpled up his machine and sent him hurtling down through the clouds. Now that we were rid of this pestilent hornet, we arose into the sky and sped eastward until we were directly over the German aerodrome, which, by the by, was our original destination. They saw us coming and a half dozen planes frantically tried to get up into the air and head

us off. One of them left the ground, but Ferguson riddled its pilot with machine gun bullets, and down it went. Another got up fifty feet, but Ferguson sent it down after the first. After we had bombed the aerodrome, and set the hangars on fire in a dozen places, we turned homeward to the French camp which was fully twenty miles away. One single German machine tried to intercept us. We volplaned down toward him and he turned tail and ran away. Once more we passed through the zone of fire. Perfect festoons of bombs and shrapnel rose about us, but we got through all right. Not quite all right, for just here was where we got our medicine. They winged us with grape, or canister or shrapnel so that one of our planes just managed to hang together. We had no more than got well within the French lines before the whole thing tore apart, and down we came. I didn't know anything about it until ten days afterward. That last day was certainly some day. We brought down three German planes, set their hangars on fire and killed more than a dozen Boches. Ferguson and I both got the French war cross for it. Here is mine."

Christopher put his hand in his vest pocket and pulled forth a bronze cross about two inches long. Joe took it and looked at it wonderingly and lovingly.

"Why don't you pin it on your vest and wear it?" asked he.

"I don't know. I never cared for that sort of thing.

There are a lot of Johnnies going about the country wearing all sorts of decorations. Most of those fellows never saw France. I'm afraid I might be taken for one of them. Joe, what's your dog's name?"

"His name is Gyp."

"Come here Gyp. Come Gyp. Good doggie, good doggie."

Gyp came obediently to Van Zant who was sitting on the ground facing Joe who was perched upon his fallen tree. Van Zant patted the dog's head.

"What's happened to him?" he asked. "He seems to be lame."

"His leg was broken by an automobile. I set it. I took the splints and bandages off about four weeks ago."

"And how did you know how to set a broken leg?"

"I worked for a doctor for two weeks or so. I saw him set a boy's arm one day. It was easy."

"Well, Joe, you are certainly some smart boy. You ought to be over in France in the Ambulance Corps doing your bit. How would you like it?"

"First rate. I'd go in a minute if I could go with you. Say Kit, may I go with you when you go back?"

"Perhaps so. We'll see about it. It must be four o'clock and we should be going."

"That's so. I must be back at the house by five o'clock. Miss Trimbley gives me every afternoon out from two to five."

"Suppose we go for a ride in my car. We'll run about for a half an hour and I'll leave you at Miss Trimbey's house."

"Oh, I'd love to. I've never been in an automobile but twice, and then I didn't really have what you'd call a ride. But where is your car? I haven't seen any."

"It's over on the other side of the woods. Wait a minute, and we'll start."

Christopher arose from the ground, leveled his field glasses at the castle, and took a long and searching look.

"Can't see anything of the lady," he said to himself. "Those men are moving about, all of them except the old gentleman. Perhaps they won't let her show herself at the windows when they are home."

When he went to pick up his traps, Joe insisted on carrying the easel, and so the procession set out for the car. Gyp first, Van Zant second, and Joe bringing up the rear. When the man and boy entered the car Gyp jumped in with them. After they had motored about the country for about ten miles, Christopher drove the car to number twelve Sumner Street. Miss Trimbey was sitting upon the porch in her wheel chair. She started forward in astonishment at seeing Joe in the car with Christopher.

"Oh, that was fine," exclaimed Joe. "Say Kit, are you going to paint in the woods tomorrow afternoon, and may I come too? I want to hear you spill some more talk about the flying business."

"Of course you may, Joe. I'll expect you."

Christopher noticed as he drove away that Miss Trimbey was looking in his direction, and that she was questioning the boy closely.

"She seems to take a great interest in the lad," thought he. "And she wants to know who his associates are. That boy will be well looked after, and I'm glad of it."

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CHAPTER VI

WHY MARTHA LEFT

The next afternoon at two o'clock Christopher was at his post in the woods which overlooked the castle. He had set up his easel and canvas, but had done absolutely no work at all upon the famous picture. Instead he spent his time gazing intently at the windows and doorways of the old building and at the lawns and alleyways amid the trees and shrubbery.

"No signs of the beautiful lady," muttered he. "Neither has the old gentleman put in an appearance. I've seen Morel, Barry and Flint passing about and that's all. I am more and more convinced that the mysterious fair one only shows herself when the men are away. As soon as they go away again I'm going to break into the house and see if I can find her."

At about a quarter past two Joe and Gyp arrived. Joe went over and inspected the picture on the easel.

"You haven't done a single thing to it since we were here yesterday," declared he, scornfully. "Do you know, I don't think that you're a painter at all."

"That's what a lot of my outspoken friends say," answered Christopher, laughing.

"I don't mean that you can't paint, because you do actually paint quite well."

"Thanks Joe for the compliment though it seems to me that you are damning me with very faint praise."

"What I mean is that you didn't come here to paint a picture, that your paint things are all a humbug, that you're not a painter, but something else."

"And what else am I?"

"I think that you're a detective. Not a regular detective like Sherlock Holmes or Monsieur Lupin or Nick Carter, but a sort of an amateur, a chap who detects on his own account."

"And what do you think I'm detecting?"

"Why the folks in the castle of course. That's why you come to this spot, where you can spy out everything that goes on there without their seeing you, and that's why you use those glasses. You were looking through them as I came along. Say Kit, if you want to know anything about that Blackstone castle, why don't you ask me?"

"What do you know about it, and where did you get your knowledge?"

"I know all about it, all about the inside of it, and all about the people. Martha Babbitt, the girl who cooked for them up to a week ago is a sister to Susan Babbitt, Miss Trimbley's hired girl. I used to go errands for Susan to her sister Martha at the castle. When the men were away, Martha Babbitt

showed me over the castle, or let me wander up and down stairs by myself. Have you ever been inside of the house? Do you want to know how it's fixed?"

"I've never been inside, and I'd like to know very much how the rooms are arranged."

"Well, you see that big octagon tower in the front? On the first floor of that tower is the library. There are three or four mirrors in that room that go from the floor to the ceiling, and there's a big fireplace there and lots of bookcases filled with books. Next on the left of the library, back of those great arched doors, is the hallway. In the middle of the hallway is a wide staircase that goes up to the second story, and from the top of the stairway you go both to right and left. To the left of the hallway in that big square tower is the parlor, a great long room like a dance hall. Back of these rooms come the dining room, a big billiard room, the kitchen and laundries and a lot of other places too numerous to mention. On the second story are the bedrooms and the bath rooms and two or three picture galleries and a museum and some smoking rooms and a sun parlor. From the second to the third and fourth stories of the octagon tower there's a winding or spiral staircase. The third story of the tower is filled with old portraits, and the fourth floor is almost full of boxes and trunks, broken furniture and old rubbish. All these rooms and every part of the castle are just chock full of pictures and statues and tapestries and vases and guns

and swords and armor and heathen idols and stuffed animals and everything you ever heard of beside. Now you know all about the inside of the castle. What else do you want to know?"

"How many people are there in the castle? And who are they?"

"There are just four and they're all men. There's Mr. Gideon Blackstone, there's his secretary, Morel, his chauffeur, Barry, and his butler, Flint."

"What sort of men are those three servants?"

"The worst ever. I hate 'em all. Morel's the meanest. He's a cold, calculating devil. I'm awfully afraid of him. Barry is a scoundrel and he and Morel are as thick as thieves. Jacob Flint, the butler, is drunk the most of the time; when he's drunk he's bad enough and when he's sober he's ten times worse. I wonder that Mr. Blackstone keeps those men. I should think he'd fire them all. Perhaps, though, he doesn't dare. Perhaps they've got him so that they can do as they please."

"Joe did you ever see a young lady? Did you ever hear that there was a young lady in the castle?"

"A young lady! Of course not. How could there be a young lady in the castle? There isn't a female person anywhere about it since Martha Babbitt and Polly Sanders left. Polly Sanders is a girl who came day times to help Martha out."

"Just why did Martha and Polly leave?"

"Because things got too hot for 'em. There was too much swearing and fighting and drinking and card playing going on. They used to leave empty bottles and cards and cigars and cigarette ends lying about here, there and everywhere. Martha says that the place was no longer respectable. Jacob Flint, the butler, was drunk all the time and Morel was quarreling with him and pitching into him. Once he knocked him down. Martha saw him do it. Morel and Barry were also fighting together."

"But what about Mr. Blackstone? He isn't the man to countenance such things. He doesn't drink and he doesn't swear or play cards."

"I don't know. Martha says that she never saw him for the last week of her stay, excepting when he went out in the car. She never used to hear his voice even. Perhaps they kept him locked up or something like that. Someone ought to get in there and see what's the matter. Perhaps the old man needs help."

"Perhaps he does. I think that I'll have to look into the matter myself some day."

"Say, Kit, you were going to tell me some more about aeroplaning. What's that book you have there? Is that about aeroplanes?"

"No, it's a novel. I've had enough of aeroplanes for the present, and I read stories to get my mind off of them. This is a novel by George Sand, called 'Consuelo.' Do you want to take it home and read it?"

"I've already read it."

"What's that, you've read 'Consuelo?' What else have you read by George Sand?"

"I've read the 'Snow Man' and 'La Petite Fadette.' "

"George Sand was a great novelist, wasn't he?"

"George Sand wasn't a man. George Sand was a woman. Her name was Madam DuDevant."

"I couldn't catch you, could I, Joe? There was another great woman novelist. George Elliot. Have you read any of her books?"

"Yes, I've read 'Adam Bede,' 'The Mill on the Floss' and 'Romola.' "

"It's of no use asking you further, Joe. If you've read the books you have already named, you've probably read a hundred others just as good. You are certainly a very well read boy. I notice that you give the French name of 'The Little Fadette.' You didn't read it in French, did you?"

"Why not? Of course I did. I read German too."

"Where on earth did you learn French and German?"

"At the orphan asylum."

"That must be some orphan asylum."

Christopher looked at Joe speculatively. The least shadow of a doubt began to enter his mind as to the exact truth of Joe's account of himself.

"Joe," asked the young man, "who cut your hair?"

"It was cut by a girl."

"I believe you. You look like the farmer boys whose mothers hollow out a half pumpkin, clap it down on the boys' heads, and cut the hair in a straight line all around the head, where it comes below the pumpkin. You ought to go to a regular barber."

"I'm going to, pretty soon," said Joe.

Presently Christopher noticed that the boy held a small, round mirror, about two and a half inches in diameter, in his hands, and was moving it to and fro.

"What are you trying to do?" he asked.

"I'm trying to throw a spot of light on the castle," Joe replied.

"You can't do it. The sun is too far in the West. It's almost at our backs. You could do it though if you had two mirrors, and held them opposite to each other. You hold number one at arm's length and number two near your breast, the sunlight strikes upon number one, is reflected back to number two, and from number two is thrown upon the castle. That's the way we heliograph. We have two mirrors facing each other on the top of a tripod, and they are adjusted in their relations to each other and in their relation to the sun by screws or levers. Have you ever heard of heliographing?"

"Yes, I know it's done by mirrors, but I don't know how they signal the words."

"It's done by the Morse alphabet, just the same as in telegraphy. Instead of pressing down a key as in

telegraphing, we tilt the mirror up and down or sideways, so as to make the flashes of light intermittent. The short flashes are the Morse dots, the long flashes are the Morse dashes."

"I'd like to learn how to do it. All I've done before now was to throw the light into people's faces and make 'em squint. I suppose you used to heliograph a lot from your aeroplane."

"You can't heliograph from an aeroplane. When you heliograph, you're got to be stationary. I've done it though from a captive balloon when there was no breeze. Let me take your mirror and I'll show you how to heliograph. Do you see that short stretch of stone wall just visible in between the trees and bushes, two or three hundred feet to the right and south of the castle?"

"Yes, I can see it. It's part of the stone fence which surrounds the grounds."

"Well, I'm going to heliograph a message on that piece of wall. It's in the shadow, which darkens it and makes it all the better for our purpose."

Christopher took the mirror, and moving it this way and that, at length succeeded in focusing a spot of light upon the wall.

"Now, Joe, what shall I write upon the wall?"

"Write the word 'Kit.'"

Christopher tilted the mirror up and down, so that the spot of light alternately left the wall and came

down again upon it. Now he worked it quickly, and now somewhat less so.

"Those quick flashes are the dots," said he. "The slow ones are the dashes. There, that spells 'Kit.' Would you like to learn it? It's easy. And then, too, if you learn to heliograph, you will know how to telegraph."

"You bet I'd like to learn it. But how could I?"

Christopher took out a memorandum book and tore a sheet from it. Down one side of the sheet he wrote the letters of the alphabet. Opposite each letter he penciled its equivalent in dots and dashes.

"There, that's the Morse code," said he, handing the paper to Joe. "You can study it and practice with it at home. Don't send your heliograph messages into people's eyes, though. You'll make yourself as unpopular as a young man learning to play the cornet."

"I'm going to try and put a message on that wall myself," said Joe. "I'm going to send the word 'Gyp.' "

He looked over his alphabet and found the required signs for the letter "G". Then he worked the mirrors much in the manner used by Christopher. He was rather slow and uncertain at first in his manipulation of the mirror, and it was necessary for Christopher to correct him several times. At length, however, the word "Gyp" was heliographed to the spot on the garden wall.

"You are getting along famously," said Christopher. "We'll try it again the next time we come up here. The knowledge of it will come in handy when you are serving in the Ambulance corps in France. Well, it's half past four and high time we were going. We'll take another ride in my car, and I'll leave you at your house. What was Miss Trimbley saying to you about me as I drove away yesterday?"

"She wanted to know who you were, how I came to know you, and what kind of a man you were."

"What did you answer to the last question?"

"I told her you were a bully good chap, an all around topper and all to the mustard."

"Joe, there's one thing I would like to have you do. You use a lot of slang. I want you to break yourself of the habit."

"All right, Kit, I'll cut it out, honest to goodness. Miss Trimbley said, too, that she wanted to see you next time you came."

When Christopher drove his car up in front of Miss Trimbley's house, the old lady was sitting on the porch in her wheel chair. Christopher went up the steps and took a chair beside her. Joe went into the house.

"I want to speak to you about Joe, Mr. Van Zant," said Miss Trimbley. "He has been with me now only three or four weeks, he is a very good boy. I have taken a great interest in him and I want him to grow up to be a fine young man."

"I feel just as you do about him, Miss Trimbey. I have only seen him twice, but I like him amazingly. He is an extraordinary little chap, but very good and very docile. We'll make a fine man of him, never fear."

"I'm glad to hear you talk so. You can do a lot toward it. He naturally looks up to you as a sort of demigod. It will be easy for you to influence him one way or the other. I hope that you will never teach him anything to his disadvantage."

"You may depend upon it that I never shall. My father and mother of blessed memory told me never to do or say anything before a boy which I would not do or say before a girl, and I have done my best to follow their counsel."

"That's the way to talk. You speak as though your father and mother were dead. I'm glad to see that you honor their memory. I think, Mr. Van Zant, that you are a nice young man, and I shall feel that Joe is safe in your company. He tells me that you have been fighting in France, on the side of the Allies, that you have been fighting on the right side. I wish that I were a young and able-bodied man, instead of a poor, decrepit old woman. I'd go and fight them too. If you go to France again, my prayers will go with you."

"She's a very estimable old lady," thought Christopher, as he drove his car away. "Joe has a good home with her, and I hope that he will appreciate it and keep

it. He's a fine little chap, and I feel strangely drawn toward him. It's a funny thing, too, because generally I dislike boys amazingly. They are too obstreperous, make too much noise, and like to kill things, birds, insects and small animals. I can't bring myself to kill things. I'd hate to kill even a Boche. I'd rather let Jim Ferguson do it. What a handsome little chap he is, too. He's the handsomest boy I've seen in an age. When he grows up,

He'll bother the hearts
Of the girls in these parts."

CHAPTER VII

THE LADY REAPPEARS

Van Zant got out his car after dinner next day with the idea of driving to the woods and meeting JC at their usual place of rendezvous. As he was climbing up over the hill from the village, he met Mr. Blackstone's big green car, which was occupied as usual by the chauffeur, Mr. Morel and the old gentleman himself.

"They are going to the city," thought Christopher, "and now is my time for exploring the castle, and solving the mystery of the beautiful lady. I must find out first, though, whether they really intend such an extended trip. I don't want them to come back unexpectedly and catch me burglarizing the mansion."

As the two cars passed, Christopher closely scrutinized Mr. Blackstone and his companions. The old gentleman sat stolidly upright, gazing neither to the right or left. The chauffeur and the secretary simply gave Christopher a careless glance. As soon as he could do so without attracting attention, Christopher turned about and followed the green car. His pursu-

led him to the village and up Sumner Street to Sumner. Without stopping at the railway station, the Blackstone party passed through the town and entered the main state highway which led to Boston.

"They're bound for the city and no mistake," thought Christopher. "It will take them hours to go and come. Now is my time."

When he arrived at the walls of the castle grounds, he took the narrow road which led down to the cliffs, and ran his car among the clumps of trees which had sheltered it before. Climbing the stone wall, he let himself down into the grounds, and dodging from tree to tree, approached the castle.

"I must look out for that fellow Flint," thought he. "He must be around the building somewhere, but as all accounts agree that he's drunk most of the time, I probably won't have much trouble with him."

Watching his opportunity and discovering no signs of the inebriate Flint, Christopher made a dash and reached the walls of the castle. Hoping to find an unlocked window, he made the entire circuit of the building. It was all in vain, however, everything was closed and fastened tighter than a drum. Moreover, outside of every window, doubtless a defense against burglars, there was a grille of heavy iron wire woven in diamond pattern. On the south side of the building, thirty or forty feet back from the front, in the second story, there was a balcony. A great part of the wall here-

abouts was covered with ivy, also the brick work had been laid with convenient ledges. Grasping the stout ropes of ivy and stepping from ledge to ledge, he had no difficulty in gaining the balcony. From the balcony, French windows led inward. They were fastened, but he had no trouble in throwing back the catch with his knife.

Pushing one of the swinging windows open, he entered a large bed chamber which was richly furnished with old mahogany but which was evidently not in use. From the chamber he went out into a passage which took him to the head of the wide staircase of the central hall, by which he descended to the ground floor. Here he found everything as Joe had described it; the great hallway in the middle of the front, the library in the octagon tower to the right, and the salon or parlor in the square tower to the left. Also there was a room beyond the library and another beyond the parlor which the boy had not mentioned in his description. Christopher inspected these rooms carefully. After that he went towards the rear of the mansion, passing through the dining room, a lounging room or den, the kitchen, scullery and laundry. Finding a stairway leading downward to the cellar, he pushed an electric button at the head of it, and going down into the cellar, explored its every nook and corner. It was an immense vault, the roof of which was supported by stone pillars and arches. In one corner

there was partitioned off a wine room with bins and racks of bottles. The door of this room stood open and the floor was strewn with bottles broken and whole.

Going upstairs again and ascending to the second story, he made the rounds of all the bed chambers, the picture galleries, smoking rooms, billiard room, and the museum and the sun parlor. He then went into the second story room of the octagon tower, and ascended to the third and fourth stories by means of a winding stairway. The third story room was hung around with portraits, the fourth story contained trunks, chests, broken furniture and a general assortment of rubbish. This room was very dark and gloomy as the windows were mere slits in the walls, one window for every facet of the octagon.

Van Zant had now completed his tour of the castle, and had found the plan of it substantially according to Joe's description. Also as Joe had said, the whole interior of the building was filled to overflowing with treasures of art, with curiosities, with rich furniture and relics of antiquity. Several times he had been startled upon turning a corner by the appearance of a man in armor or by a life size bronze statue. More than once his breath had been taken away by the sudden view of some splendid painting or priceless tapestry.

"I wonder where that man Flint keeps himself," soliloquized Christopher. "He didn't go with Mr.

Blackstone, and he isn't in the castle, unless he has hidden himself in one of those suits of armor or concealed himself in one of those thundering big vases. Now for the library and Mr. Blackstone's desk."

The young man went down to the library in the octagon tower, and seating himself in front of a large and magnificent buhl desk which stood beside the windows, opened and went through the contents of all its drawers. Apparently not finding anything to his purpose, he lifted the waste paper basket and dumped its contents upon the desk. Sorting out the different scraps of paper, he soon had put together almost completely several letters. They were all from brokers in New York, and they were all substantially of the same tenor. The following is a fair example of the lot:

"Mr. Gideon Blackstone,

"East Halford, Mass.

"Dear Sir :

Your letter of the 8th was received in due time, together with certificates for 2000 shares of C. & O. R. R. According to your instructions, we have sold this stock at the market. We enclose separate memorandum of the sale, giving the figures and the name of purchaser. Shall we send you cheque for the amount due you, or shall we hold funds subject to your further orders?

"Yours truly,

"Maxwell & Smith."

"That's queer," muttered Christopher. "The old gentleman is evidently selling all his securities. According to these letters, he has already sold stocks to the value of several hundred thousand dollars. He doesn't seem to be buying any either. He is simply turning his holdings into cash. I don't like the looks of it. I don't like the looks of the house. Disorder reigns everywhere, the dust is a sixteenth of an inch thick on all the furniture, bottles half full or empty, foul drinking glasses, cards, cigar and cigarette ends litter the whole place. I don't like Mr. Blackstone's appearance. He isn't the man I was told he was. He looks slovenly, stupid and unnatural. There's something mysterious and sinister about the whole affair. What is the secret of it?"

Van Zant, throwing the papers back into the basket, crossed the room, and stretching himself out in a large leather covered easy chair which stood before a mirror beside the big fireplace, filled his pipe and lighted it. The doorway into the hall was situated at the further side of the fireplace, but the fireplace and mantel projected four or five feet into the room and cut off his view of the doorway.

"Yes," he continued his soliloquy. "Things are in a bad way here, and I certainly did the right thing when I came on to investigate. On the top of it all, the question of the beautiful lady has to be injected into the situation, the girl whom I saw looking out of

the third story tower window three days ago. I certainly did see her. I was fully awake and I wasn't doped or intoxicated. I am equally certain that she isn't in the castle now. I've looked into every room, every closet, every corner, I wonder where she is and whether I shall ever see her again."

His question was answered almost immediately. A change swept across the mirror in front of him, and glancing up into the glass, he saw pictured there the beautiful lady. Her white neck and round arms were bare, she wore a gown of violet colored figured silk, the waist was tight fitting and showed to advantage a slender but well-developed figure, the short skirt was flounced from hem to waist with seven deep flounces, she wore violet silk stockings over the trimmest of ankles, white slippers over the smallest of feet, and upon her brown head there was a picture hat, caught up at the side with a bunch of violets. Her skirt was spread out as if with hoops, and her full costume suggested the fashions of fifty years before.

He glanced across his shoulder, expecting to see her standing in the room. All he saw was another reflection of the damsel in a mirror upon the opposite wall. She was standing in the doorway beyond the fireplace. Her form was reflected in the mirror upon the opposite wall, and from that to the glass in front of him. He sprang up and hurried around the fireplace, but the girl had vanished. There was a patter of slippers, a swish of skirts and that was all.

He stood in the hall doorway and cogitated. He was simply nonplussed. She hadn't had time to cross the hall and enter some other room, she hadn't had time to mount the stairs. There was a small door under the stairs. He went to it and opened it, disclosing a closet under the stairway which contained outer garments upon hooks, also it contained umbrellas and rubber overshoes, but it didn't contain the beautiful lady.

"That's the queerest thing that ever I saw," muttered he. "It was like magic, now I saw her and again I didn't. Where could she have possibly got to in that one second?"

He ran through all the apartments on the first floor, opening cupboards, looking behind bulky objects and beneath lounges and tables, but all to no purpose. The lady of the castle had vanished into thin air.

"Hullo, Miss!" he cried. "Where are you? You needn't be afraid of me. I'm harmless. Come out here and we'll talk it over. Hullo, hullo!"

There was no answer. Throughout the castle silence reigned profound and supreme. Christopher sat down again in the leather covered easy chair in the library, and again lighted his pipe.

"Perhaps she will come again if I wait long enough," thought he.

A very long time he sat there, and all the time his thoughts were continually of the beautiful vision

"I meant to come, but I was unavoidably detained. I had some business which I absolutely had to look after. Joe, are you positively sure that there is no lady in the castle?"

"Of course I am. Didn't I tell you so before? Kit, you've got ladies on the brain. I'll bet you think of nothing else. I thought you were a man's man, like the chaps I read about in the books. Instead of that, you're a girl's man."

"What makes you think so?" asked Van Zant, laughing.

"I don't think it. I know it. You may suppose that you can fuss around with a girl without anybody knowing it. You may do it where you came from, but you can't do it in East Halford. You can't go with a girl here twice, but everybody in town is wise to it. You took that Miss Maud Holloway to the moving pictures Monday night and Tuesday night. Both nights you bought her ice cream at Sessions' drug store. Wednesday morning you took her riding in your car. If I had known it then, I wouldn't have ridden with you myself."

"I plead guilty to the indictment. What's the punishment?"

"There isn't any punishment. It doesn't make any difference to me what you do. Going with a girl like Maud Holloway will bring its own punishment. I don't understand what you see in a girl like that. She's

ignorant, she's vain and silly. She powders her nose, rouges her mouth and blacks her eyelids. I wouldn't touch her with a ten-foot pole. I wouldn't come near her. I don't see why men should want to fuss around girls for anyway. I wouldn't do it. Not any of it for me, no thank you. The first thing you know, you'll be married to her, and then, good night."

For the rest of the afternoon, the boy was sulky and distant. When it came time to go home, he refused to ride with Christopher, and walked off alone.

"He's a peppery little chap all right," thought Christopher. "He's an out and out woman hater, but he'll get over it when he grows up, just as we all do."

CHAPTER VIII

SECRET PASSAGES

Sunday morning Christopher went to church with Mrs. Holloway, Maud Holloway and Martha Babbitt. He sat at the head of the Holloway pew, and helped Maud hold her prayer book and hymn book. Hiram Holloway, the canny Yankee proprietor of the Castle Inn, though he maintained a pew in the Protestant Episcopal church, never went to church himself. There were in the village of East Halford a number of old and influential citizens who were wont to visit the Inn Sunday mornings to get their Sunday morning nip. If Hiram wasn't there, they didn't get it. Besides that, he took in enough money from these Sabbath nips to pay the pew rent.

Just before services commenced, Miss Althea Trimbley entered the church in her wheel chair. Joe propelled her down to the very front and, leaving her in the aisle, took a seat himself in a nearby pew. Joe looked back of him and saw Christopher standing next Miss Holloway. He was holding her hymn book and she was gazing up at him with a languishing glance.

Christopher winked at Joe, but the boy, with a look of scorn, turned away his head.

The next afternoon at two o'clock, Christopher, sitting upon the porch of the Castle Inn, saw the big, green Blackstone car with its customary occupants come down the hill into the village and turn into Sumner Street.

"They've undoubtedly gone to the city again," thought he. "Now is my chance to find that elusive girl. She sha'n't escape me again."

He got out his car, drove it to the castle and left it upon the cliff road under the trees beside the garden wall. Then he swung himself over the wall, walked boldly across the grounds, and gaining the south side of the castle, climbed as before to the balcony and entered the building.

Thinking that he might meet the lady of his thoughts, he wandered here, there and everywhere, covering in his perambulations almost the whole of the first and second floors. Finally he went to the library in the octagon tower, and flung himself into the great easy chair which he had occupied the preceding Friday.

"She is as likely to make her appearance here as anywhere," thought he.

When a quarter hour had passed, he heard men's voices from the outside of the front of the building, and a sound of footsteps upon the walk and the porch steps.

“Great Scott!” he exclaimed, “they’ve come back. Who would have thought it? I should have followed them through Sumner and made sure of their destination. Never mind, they’ll never find me. I’ll get out of the balcony window and slip through the shrubbery to the park wall.”

He ran into the hall and up the broad staircase to the top. Where the right hand passage commenced, there stood a square newel post or pedestal surmounted by a marble statue of Psyche. He crouched down behind the pedestal and looked and listened.

The front door opened and two men, whom Van Zant recognized as Morel and Barry, entered the hall. Morel locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

“We’s got him to rights now,” declared Morel. “That was his car down the cliff road by the wall under the trees. He’s in the castle, and he can’t escape. We laid a smart trap for him, and he swallowed the bait. It’s just as I told you. He’s the fellow who has been hanging around the town for the last week. He’s here with an especial object and that object means no good to us. I shouldn’t wonder if he was a special secret service chap or something like that. I’ve sent Flint around to the back of the house. He’s to go up stairs and search the second story. You stand here and guard the main staircase, and I’ll go to the kitchen and head him off at the foot of the kitchen stairs. Now remember, no shooting unless you have to. I’m

opposed to unnecessary homicide. It always makes trouble. It's better to put him to sleep with a good wallop on the head, and stow him in some safe place, for instance in the cellar or in the fourth story tower room."

Saying this, Morel opened a door to the left of the stairway and proceeded toward the back of the house. Christopher silently tiptoed up the few remaining steps and entered the passage which led to the balcony room.

"So Jacob Flint, the butler, is with him," muttered Christopher. "I didn't see him in the car. Perhaps he was here all the time spying on me. Most likely he was here Friday, too. Mr. Blackstone doesn't seem to have returned with them. I wonder what they did with him."

When the young man had almost reached the doors of the balcony room, he saw a man coming along the passage toward him. He was a thick-set, smooth-faced, stolid person. Undoubtedly it was Jacob Flint, the butler, and it was evident, too, that Mr. Flint meant business.

Christopher made a dash for the door of the room he sought, but he didn't reach it quite soon enough. He managed to get inside, but he failed to close the door entirely against the sudden and ponderous rush of Jacob Flint. Now he would get it almost shut and would be about to shoot the bolt, and then Flint would push it three or four inches away from the jamb.

"This is foolish," thought Van Zant. "This noise will bring the other two men up here, and then I'm done for. Better take the initiative."

He suddenly sprang away from the door and Flint came catapulting into the room like a ton of coal. As the man flew past him, Christopher added to his impetus with a swift and well placed kick which sent him across the room and landed him on the floor in front of the balcony windows. As he arose to his knees, Christopher rushed from the room and along the passage.

"I'll have to give up the balcony for the present," thought he. "I'll try some other part of the house. Perhaps there's a way to get to the ground without dropping twenty feet or more."

He entered and passed through a large picture gallery. There was no way of escape and no hiding place there. From the picture gallery he went into the museum. As he stood in the middle of the floor reconnoitering, Flint entered the chamber and made a rush for him. Christopher awaited his coming and, at the proper moment, side stepped and thrust forth his foot. Jacob Flint tripped, tumbled to the floor with a great thud, and lay there quite still. Christopher rushed back to the door of the balcony chamber, but found that Flint had locked it and taken away the key.

"No use trying to find it," thought Christopher. "He'll probably come to before I can go through half his pockets. I'll try the lower floor."

He made his way toward the rear of the house, and coming to a stairway, went to descend it. When he had gone down three or four steps, he stopped. Morel was standing at the bottom with an automatic in his hand.

"Better come down now," said Morel, grinning. "You'll have to come sooner or later."

"I'll think about it," answered Van Zant, as he moved away.

Going to the front of the house, he approached the hall staircase cautiously. Barry was standing at the foot of the stairs. Sometimes also he took a few steps this way and that. Timing his steps with those of Barry, so that he would not be heard, Christopher tiptoed down until he was within a few steps of the bottom. At that moment Barry turned his head and saw him. Instantly, Christopher jumped from the sixth step, landing upon Barry's head and shoulders, bringing him to the floor and knocking the breath completely out of his body.

Christopher now rushed into the large salon to the left of the hall, and from there to the apartment beyond. He presently realized what he knew before, but what he had forgotten, that all the windows on the ground floor were protected with iron grilles and therefore offered no way out of the building. Back again therefore he went into the salon, and raced toward the door at the further end of it. When he was within

fifteen feet of the door, it opened, and Morel sprang into the room. His mouth was set in a straight, implacable line, and his closely set gray eyes beamed ferocity.

In a moment the two men had clinched, and there commenced a fierce and relentless struggle for supremacy. Morel, though of a spare figure, had great strength. His thews seemed to be made of steel and his dexterity was admirable. Christopher was no weakling, however, and the struggle looked to be equal. Backward and forward they swayed. Each trying to trip the other, or get a clutch upon his throat. Presently they came to the floor, Christopher being upon top of his adversary. With a mighty effort Morel threw his opponent off, and both men arose to their feet and grappled again. Once more they fell, and this time their holds were broken, and they rolled apart.

Christopher sprang to his feet, and made a dash for the hall doorway, but he was intercepted by Barry who, by this time, had come to himself again. Christopher waited, and when the chauffeur was near enough, gave him a right and left to the stomach and neck which stretched him upon the floor. At this moment, Morel, who had regained his feet, leaped upon Christopher's back. Christopher, bending down his head, thrust his arms back of him, seized Morel and threw him over his head. Barry now came at him again, but Christopher side stepped, thrust out his foot and tripped him so

that he fell across Morel. Then the young man darted into the hall, and from the hall into the library. Morel and Barry, an instant later, came into the hall.

"We've got the fellow now," exclaimed Morel, exultantly. "There's no exit from the library or the den beyond the library excepting here into the hall. All we have to do is to wait. He has to come out sometime or other, and the rest should be easy. He has made us a lot of trouble, and I don't propose to stand for any more of it. If he shows any more fight, use your gun. I'd shoot him now just as quickly as I'd shoot a wild cat."

"What's become of Flint?" asked Barry. "He must have been knocked out. This fellow here is surely some fighter."

"Flint! Flint!" called Morel, in a loud voice. "Jacob Flint, where are you?"

There was a feeble answer somewhere upstairs, but Flint did not appear.

"He must have been put to sleep, and he hasn't fully awakened yet," declared Morel. "Never mind, we don't need him. As a matter of extra precaution, Barry, lock that door at the right of the stair leading to the back of the house. He may make a dash, and get through it."

Barry went to the door and locked it.

"You might as well lock the one on the left, too, while you are about it."

Barry went around the stairway to the door at the left of it.

"There's no key here," said he.

"Here, take this key. The one key fits both doors."

Morel took the key from the door which Barry had locked, and went around the stairway to give it to Barry. At that moment, Christopher, who stood just inside of the library door, saw the small closet door under the stairway open a few inches. Through the aperture came a small hand and a round, white arm. A finger of the hand beckoned him. It is needless to say that he needed no second invitation. Stealing swiftly across the hall floor on tiptoe, he entered the closet, and the door was closed after him.

Someone brushed against him. Someone who had a rather small and yielding body, and who wore skirts.

"It's the beautiful lady of the castle," said Christopher to himself.

There was a metallic click, and a small, round spot of light played back and forth upon the further wall. The lady had lighted an electric flashlight. Very soon the spot of light centered and lingered upon a small protuberance in the wainscotting, some six feet from the floor, which had the appearance of an electric push button. That same round, white arm and small hand again appeared out of the darkness, and a finger pressed the button. At once a part of the paneling flew to one side, and disclosed a narrow doorway. The

small hand found one of Christopher's, and he felt himself being guided through the opening. When they were through, the panel closed with the snap of a self-locking device.

The touch of that small, guiding hand thrilled him through and through. He felt prickling waves course through his body. The hand was delightfully firm and cool, but not cold. He now found himself in a passage hardly two and a half feet wide. The spot of light from the electric torch showed the passage ahead of them, but gave him not the slightest view of his companion.

"I wish you would turn the light on yourself for a moment," said he, "I want to see what you are like."

"Hush, hush!" the mysterious lady answered in a whisper. "They will hear us and follow us. Wait until we are beyond the castle walls."

They proceeded along the passage toward the rear of the mansion. When Christopher had counted about thirty paces, they came to a stairway leading upward to the right, and another leading downward to the left. Taking the latter, they descended fifteen steps, and found themselves in a level passage which continued on a line with the stairway, and which had stone walls, ceiling and floor. The floor was uneven, and Christopher presently stumbled and pitched forward against his guide. He involuntarily grasped the person ahead of him with his disengaged hand, and the substance which his hand encountered would have convinced him

that his companion was a very shapely young woman, had he not been very sure of it before. A scent of lavender came from her garments, and the swish and feeling of her skirts told him that they were of silk. It was no ordinary female who accompanied him, but a young lady of high degree.

“You must be more careful,” cautioned she, still in a whisper, and with what sounded like a very faint, little laugh.

After they had gone some thirty or forty paces, they came to an ascending stairway which they mounted and which brought them to a small room, not more than six or eight feet across.

“Now,” said he, “we must be some distance beyond the castle walls, and we can talk without fear of being heard. In the first place, please tell me whether you are the same very handsome young lady whom I saw Friday afternoon standing in the doorway, between the hall and the library, and also whom I saw last Tuesday afternoon looking out of the third story windows of the octagonal tower?”

“You must speak in a lower tone of voice,” she answered, still in a whisper. “They may have followed us, and may be at your very elbow. I don’t know whether you saw me, or someone else. I think, though, that I was up in the third story of the tower last Tuesday, and I may have looked into the library Friday afternoon.”

"When you looked out of the tower window, I thought you nodded to me, was I right?"

"The idea! I wouldn't be likely to nod to a complete stranger."

"I thought perhaps that you wanted me, that you needed my assistance. I thought that you might be a prisoner in the castle. Tell me, are you here of your own free will?"

"Of course I am. I come and go just when I please."

"Of course you don't live in the castle?"

"Not all the time."

"Then you must live nearby. Will you not tell me your name and where you live?"

"Why should you wish to know?"

"Because I want to see you again in some place where we can talk without restraint. Naturally, I want to thank you for coming to my aid so opportunely. I own, too, that you have puzzled and mystified me. I am terribly interested in you. Positively, I must see you again, not once, but many times. When and where may I see you?"

"I don't know, perhaps never. I see no need or occasion for it. When you bid me good-bye, it will be wiser that we do not meet again."

"You are a very cold and hard-hearted young person. I warn you that I am coming to the castle often and that I shall never give up trying to see you."

“Really, you mustn’t do that.”

“Tell me something else. Do those men know that you come here?”

“I don’t think so. I would be afraid to have them know.”

“Does Mr. Blackstone know?”

“I hope not. I don’t think that he has seen me.”

“Can’t you tell me why you come here?”

“No, no, it’s a secret, it’s something terrible.”

“Perhaps, if you told me all about it, I could help you. I have a great interest myself in the affairs of the castle. Since I have seen you, though, that interest has been completely overshadowed. Sometimes I almost forget my original object.”

“You mustn’t let any thought of me interfere with your business, whatever it is. It would be foolish. Now I’ll let you out, we have been loitering here too long already.”

“First turn the light on your face. I want to see it again.”

“You must wait until we are outside. Then you may look at me all you want.”

She flashed the light across the room upon an iron door, then it moved up to the key hole of the door.

“Stand right here by the edge of the door,” she commanded, “so you can go out when I open the door. We can’t be too careful.”

He stood by the door, her white arm was extended,

she put a key in the lock and turned it, whereat the door opened inward so that she stood behind it. At the same time, she pushed him with her disengaged hand, and he stepped out into the sunlight. He gazed about him for a second, his eyes somewhat dazzled by the quick transition from darkness to daylight. Then he turned to look at the girl. Even as he did so the door closed in his face, so that he caught not the slightest glimpse of her. He rapped on the door, and called to her repeatedly, but there was no answer. The only sound that came to him was that of her retreating footsteps as she descended the stairs.

"She's a very inhospitable and obdurate minx," thought he. "Still, she pulled me out of a very tight place, and I won't find fault with her. Find fault with her, indeed! She's the loveliest girl in the world. She's the only girl in the world. I'm simply crazy about her, and I don't propose to give her up."

The building from which he had come was a small red brick structure, not more than six by eight feet on the ground and not more than seven feet high. Its slate roof was covered with moss, and its walls were blackened by age. It looked like a smoke house, where hams and bacon are cured, such as one still sometimes sees in farm yards.

Christopher made his way across the grounds of the castle, scaled the wall, and stepping into his car set out for his hotel, where he arrived in a few minutes.

He was sore and bruised in every part of his body from his tussles with the brigands, Morel, Barry and Flint. Fortunately, though, he had received no serious blows, and his face was unmarred. He took a bath, anointed himself plentifully with arnica and gave himself a hard and thorough rubbing. When he got up the next morning, he felt as fit as ever.

CHAPTER IX

THE DANCING GIRL

The next three days passed uneventfully. Every afternoon Van Zant went to that spot in the woods where Joe and he were wont to meet, that place which, by common consent, they had named "The Lookout," but the boy never came at all.

"The cranky little chap is still mad about that Holloway girl," thought he. "When he saw me in the church with her Sunday, it doubtless added fuel to his displeasure. Oh, well, he'll get over it when he finds that I have forsown the fickle Maud forever."

Christopher all this time watched the castle with the eye of a lynx, waiting and hoping for the departure of Morel and his companions. What time he was not spying upon them from the opposite woods he sat upon the porch of the Castle Inn, with his roadster in readiness at the curb, watching for the Blackstone car to come down the hill and turn into Sumner Street. Friday afternoon his patience and perseverance were rewarded. At about two o'clock, the big green car came down the road and turned off toward Sumner. The

vehicle was occupied as usual, by Mr. Blackstone, Morel, his secretary, and Barry, the chauffeur.

"They never seem to take Flint with them," thought Van Zant. "I suppose that he's in the castle somewhere, waiting to spy upon me. It will be an unlucky moment for him when I find him."

There was a boy named "Peter," who hung about the hotel, and who was ready, for a suitable remuneration, to do almost anything which the proprietor or the guests required. Christopher called the boy to him and gave him a dollar.

"Pete!" said he. "Do you see that car going up Sumner Street?"

"Yes, that's old man Blackstone's car. That's old Blackstone on the back seat. John Barry's a'driving it. He's one of Miss Holloway's fellers. He takes her out in the car sometimes."

"Well, Pete, I want you to get your wheel and follow that car. I want you to see whether it stops at Sumner or goes on farther. If it goes farther, see what road they take. Perhaps they'll stop at Sumner and take the train. If they do, find out what tickets they bought. You do this well, and I'll give you another dollar. Call me up by telephone from Sumner and tell me just what they do. Now hurry, and when you come back keep your mouth shut about the whole thing."

Peter rushed away after his wheel, and in a moment

reappeared with it, and was off like the wind. In about half an hour Christopher was called to the hotel telephone.

"They left the car standing behind the depot," called Peter from the other end of the wire. "Then they bought tickets for Boston, and left all of 'em on the two-thirty train. A girl in the ticket office told me about the tickets and I saw 'em get on the train myself."

"All right, Peter, that's good. I'll leave another dollar for you with Mr. Holloway."

Van Zant jumped into his roadster and drove it full speed to the castle. Having left the car in the usual place, he swung himself over the park wall, circled the mansion and climbed to the balcony. To his relief, he found that the door from the chamber to the passage had been unlocked since the Monday when he had last been there. If it had been locked, he meant to force it with a chisel which he brought with him for the purpose.

As he came from the chamber to the passage, a sound of music fell upon his ears. He went along the passage and stood at the head of the great stairway, listening. This music was from a phonograph, and came from the large salon. Christopher recognized the air at once as the beautiful and famous *Pas des Fleurs*, or flower dance by Delibes. There was also a sound as of sliding and pattering feet, as if some one were dancing.

He stole softly down the stairway, and tiptoeing to the partly open door of the salon, looked through the aperture. What he saw paralyzed him with astonishment, fairly took his breath away and gave him the big surprise of his life. The beautiful lady of the castle had set the phonograph going and was dancing all alone to the inspiring notes of the sprightly air.

She appeared just as he had seen her as she stood in the doorway between the library and the hall on the Friday before. She wore the same violet silk gown, the waist tight fitting, sleeveless and low in the neck, the short skirt flounced from hem to waist, the same picture hat, violet silk stockings and white slippers. Her figure, set off to most advantage by its dainty covering, was perfect and beyond compare, but it was her lovely face which at first claimed his whole attention. The more he looked at it, the more he stared and the more he stared, the more his wonder grew.

There was never any such dancing as that of the lady of the castle. Her dancing was simply the personification and the union of agility and beauty. She alternately stood poised upon her toes, whirled about like a teetotum, sank to the floor in supple curtsies, advanced, retreated and chassayed to right and left. Her supple body swayed this way and that, her shapely arms and hands, always in motion, now stretched before her, now flung above her head, were the very expression of sinuous grace. Her small feet now

stamped upon the floor imperatively, or scarcely touched it as she skimmed along. But the great merit of the lady's dancing was the strangeness and the quaintness of it. No one else ever danced like her. It was as though, never having seen a woman dance, she had invented it out of whole cloth. The miracle of it was that every step was so accurately timed and that every motion was so completely in harmony with the music.

Christopher was enthralled and fascinated. He felt that he could watch her forever. The phonograph, however, soon ran down and the girl stopped dancing. He thrust the door open and advanced toward her impetuously. At sight of him, she gave a little cry of terror and turning about, fled swiftly toward the further door of the salon. Christopher stood stock still for a moment, then started in energetic pursuit.

It was a merry chase this fleet-footed Diana led him. She could really run faster than he, and she was always the length of one or two apartments ahead of him. Finally, after circling the whole lower floor of the castle, he brought up in the front hall. She had vanished utterly as if in thin air, and he heard no longer the patterning of her footsteps.

"She has gone into the secret passage," thought he. "I'll capture the witch now, for all her tricks." Into the small closet under the stair he went and groped for the push button at the top of the sliding panel. At last he found and pushed it, and the panel flew open. The

passage was as dark as night, and he stumbled along through its inky darkness slowly and blunderingly. Lighting matches as he went, he at last reached the two stairways, the one going up and the other down. Here he paused, irresolute.

"What's the use," he said to himself, laughing. "She may have gone down into the stone tunnel which leads to the smoke house, or she may have gone up to the upper regions of the castle, in which case, I could never find the minx. What's the advantage of chasing the little humbug anyway? In the first place, she doesn't want to be caught, and I suppose I should respect her wishes. In the second place, I'm now sure of her, and can cultivate her acquaintance at my leisure. I'll wait until another day."

Christopher now made his way out of the secret passage, ascended the main stairway, gained the balcony room, and climbed to the ground. When he had started his car and while he was on his way to the village, he gave utterance to certain reflections, the most of which consisted of injurious epithets evidently meant to apply to himself.

"Fool," "idiot," "dolt," "blockhead," "lobster," "purblind mole" and "silly ass" were some of the names he called himself.

The next afternoon he went to the lookout in the woods, and was much pleased to find that Joe was already there. He was sitting in his accustomed place

on the fallen tree, and Gyp sat on the trunk beside him. Joe's greeting was somewhat reserved and he seemed embarrassed.

"Joe," said Christopher, in a tone of severity, "I have certain things to say to you. In the first place, I find that you are not a boy at all, that you are a girl. In the second place, I must say that you make an extremely handsome girl, that you are much handsomer as a girl than a boy. In the third place I have to remark that you dance like the queen of the fairies."

Joe hung down his or rather her head and blushed rosily.

"I was afraid that you had recognized me," murmured she in a low voice.

"Recognized you! Of course I recognized you. Yesterday for the first time, I had a full and satisfactory view of the lady of the castle, particularly of her face. It is needless to remark that I knew at once who she was. For that matter, one doesn't forget easily a face as pretty as yours, or mix it up with any other face. I thought at first that she might be your sister, and I looked again and knew that it was you, yourself. Now, most mysterious lady, will you kindly tell me a lot of things? Why is it that you are masquerading as a boy? Why is it that you haunt that old rookery of a castle? How did you come to know it so intimately? Why is it that when you are there you attire yourself in a ball dress of the fashion of

fifty years ago? Finally, what possesses you to dance all alone by yourself in such a charming and delightful manner, thus depriving us poor mortals of the pleasure of looking at you?"

"You have asked a lot of questions, and I can't answer them without telling you my whole story."

"Then tell me your whole story, you strange and wonderful girl."

"I can't do it now. It would take hours, and I must go home. Indeed, I must go right away."

"Will you tell me the story some other day?"

"Perhaps I may sometime, if circumstances are different."

"Can't you come up here tomorrow and give me the whole story?"

"I don't think that I can come here any more, at all."

"For Heaven's sake, why not?"

"Because of these boy's clothes. It was all well enough when you thought I was a boy, but now that you know that I am a girl, I couldn't do it. I would die of mortification."

Joe looked down at her legs shamefacedly. She would have covered them up, had she had the where-withal.

"Why don't you dress as a girl then? That would be easy."

"It wouldn't be easy at all. If I should tell Miss

Trimbey that I was a girl and that I had fooled her all these weeks, I'd lose my place, wouldn't I?"

"It is quite a dilemma after all. If you take my advice, you'll stick to your present outfit, and keep on being a boy. If you knew what a handsome and adorable boy you make, you wouldn't be at all ashamed of it."

"That is nonsense, and your foolish talk doesn't make me feel any better. I am going now. So, good bye, Mr. Van Zant."

"Why are you calling me 'Mr. Van Zant'? You have always called me 'Kit.' Why should you become so distant and formal just because I have discovered that you and the lady of the castle are the same?"

"I called you 'Kit' when you thought that I was a boy. Girls shouldn't call men by their first names. Come, Gyp, we must go home."

"At least you must let me take you home in my car. You can ride in the car I suppose, even if you are a girl dressed up as a boy. Besides, you can put the dust robe over your knees."

Joe was moving off slowly and dejectedly, followed by Gyp. Gyp seemed to feel that his mistress was under a cloud. He went along with his tail down in a dispirited way and limped much more than usual.

Christopher ran after Joe, and caught her by the shoulders.

"You dear little girl," said he. "You really mustn't

take things so seriously. You are making a mountain out of a mole hill. You make me sorry that I ever saw the castle lady. Now let me take you in the car, dear."

"Well, just this once," said she gravely.

"Joe," asked Christopher, as he drove up in front of Miss Trimbley's house, "are you really bent on staying away from our meeting place in the woods?"

"Yes."

"Then, I'm coming to see you here."

"You mustn't. What would Miss Trimbley think? If you come, I won't see you."

"I'll come every day until you do."

Joe made a show of going into the house, but Christopher, as he drove away, turned his head and was sure that he saw her gazing at him from behind the clematis vines.

The next afternoon, he drove his car to number twelve Sumner Street, sprang up the steps of the porch and rapped with the brass knocker. Susan Babbitt came to the door.

"I'd like to see Joe," said he.

"Joe isn't to be seen today," answered she, shutting the door.

The next day he came, and the next, but the answer was always the same.

"What's the matter?" he asked himself. "Is Joe sick, or have they found out that she is a girl and locked

her up? This makes three times, and that's the limit. Tomorrow I'm going in, if I have to push Susan out of the way. I can't sleep unless I see that girl."

CHAPTER X

ABOUT DRESS-MAKING

When he drove again to her house, the next afternoon, he was astonished to see, sitting alone upon the porch, a lovely and well-dressed young lady. He looked again to make sure. Yes, it was really Joe. He leaped from the car and hastened to her side.

“Joe!” he exclaimed, seizing her hand and pressing it warmly.

It seemed to him that her small hand rested willingly in his.

“Please explain this, Joe,” he asked. “How did it happen? How did this transformation come about?”

“Sit down there, Kit,” she answered, “and I’ll tell you all about it.”

“I’m glad to have you call me ‘Kit’ again. I was afraid you’d never do it.”

“Why shouldn’t I? It’s all right now. I feel differently now that I’m dressed properly. It was this way. When I came home yesterday afternoon, Susan Babbitt took me into the kitchen.

“‘Joe,’ said she, “I wanted to tell you that I couldn’t

keep your secret any longer. I felt that it wasn't right, and I have told Miss Trimbey.'

"What secret are you talking about, Susan," asked I.

"You know very well. You're a girl dressed up in boy's clothes, that's what you are. I knew it weeks ago, shortly after you came. You can't fool me. I felt that it would be better for you if I told her. I know her better than you, and I knew that she wouldn't be hard on you. When I saw that you were going so much with that Mr. Van Zant, I thought that the quicker I told her the truth the better. She said that she wanted to see you the minute you came home. She's waiting for you now.'

"With fear and trembling I went into the parlor, and stood in front of Miss Trimbey. I couldn't face her, and I kept looking down at a flower pattern of the rug. She looked me over like a judge who was going to sentence a criminal."

"Well, Joe, what have you to say for yourself?" she asked, in a tone of severity which I hoped was mostly put on.

"Nothing," I answered humbly.

"You young hussy!" she exclaimed. "You sit right down in that chair in front of me, and tell me why you have been masquerading in boy's clothing. It's positively shameful and shocking. Now commence at the very beginning, tell me the whole story from

first to last, and mind that you don't skip a thing.'

"So I sat there and told my story. It was four o'clock when I commenced, and long after six when I had finished. At that I left out a host of details that were not material.

"'Land of mercy!' she exclaimed. 'When I think of your going all over the country for weeks dressed in that awful disguise like a common tramp, when I think of the horrible adventures you have had, it makes me shudder. Of course you'll have to get some girl's clothes right away, and of course you can't wheel me around any more. I can't be pushed around by a girl.'

"Then I'll have to leave you, Miss Trimbey," I faltered.

"'Leave me! nonsense and fiddlesticks. You'll stay right here. I don't propose to let you go out into the world to make a fool of yourself again. Besides I think I'd be lonely. You'll stay right here and that settles it.'

"With that two tears popped out of the old lady's eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks. I got up and threw my arms around her and kissed her, and we wept together.

"'It's awful,' continued she, when she had recovered from her display of weakness. 'You come here, dressed as a boy, and worm yourself into my confidence and affection, and then you go and turn into a girl. You were the only good boy I ever had, and now

I find that you aren't a boy at all. The worst of it is that I'll have to get another boy and break him in. I hate the thought of it, they're all such pesky nuisances.'

"I don't see Miss Trimbey," said I, "why I can't wheel you around, just as before. I'd love to do it."

"Nonsense! I won't think of it for a moment. How would it look for a slim girl like you to be seen pushing me up these big hills? I must have another boy. The first thing for me to do though is to get you some decent clothes. I'll have Susan take me down street right away after supper, and I'll order you something this very night. And I want to tell you one thing, Joe. You are not to leave this house again dressed like a boy. You are not even to poke your nose out of the door."

"True to her word, Miss Trimbey, after supper, had Susan wheel her down to Sibley's dry goods store, where she looked through one of those illustrated catalogues, and ordered for me a great lot of things from Boston. They came yesterday morning, and Susan has been fitting them to me ever since. You must know that Susan, besides having many other accomplishments, is a skillful and tasteful dressmaker. There were two dresses or gowns, besides this suit which I am wearing, two hats, two pairs of shoes, some stockings, gloves and handkerchiefs and a lot of other things which I can't mention. What do you think of my suit?"

Joe arose and went to the end of the porch and

back several times. She wore a very natty, well-fitting checked worsted suit, a pair of high-topped, French heeled shoes, in buff and white, and a beautiful tie of blue and white checked silk. Her skirts were not so very long, in fact, they did not come within an inch of the tops of her shoes, but then that was the style, and a girl can't dress out of the fashion. When she made the turn at the end of the porch, she did it with a whirl which sent her skirts flying. Also she walked mincingly with different poses, movements and gestures, like a Fifth Avenue modiste's model. All, of course, for the fun and mischief of it.

"The suit fits you admirably," announced Christopher, "and it is a very handsome suit. What I'm more interested in, though, is the handsome girl inside of the suit. Absolutely you must stop that fascinating promenade, and come and sit down. If you don't, I will really have to get up and put my arms around you. Now sit down here and tell me your story just as you told it to Miss Trimbey. You promised to tell me all about yourself, and I can't keep my curiosity in bounds any longer."

"I didn't say right out and out that I would tell you my story. I simply said that I might tell it to you, if circumstances were different."

"Well, they are different, aren't they? Then you were a delinquent witch of a girl masquerading in boy's clothing. Now you are a very self-possessed and well-

dressed young lady. Now commence, and I'll listen with both ears."

"Oh, this place is too public. I would think that everybody was listening. We must wait for a more favorable opportunity."

"Suppose we get in my car, and we'll go to the lookout, our favorite spot in the woods, the place where we see everything without being seen. That leafy corner of the woods would make just the setting for your story which, I know, must be a wonderful one."

"I'll go with you on one condition."

"I accept, no matter what the condition is, but name it."

"The condition is that you never take that Maud Holloway again either in your car, or to the moving pictures."

"That will be easy. Maud and I are not at present on terms which would permit of such delicate attentions on my part."

"Of course it doesn't matter to me whether you go with other girls or not. The subject wouldn't interest me. What I do object to is that particular girl."

"Joe, it shall be as you say. Though Maud should entreat me upon bended knees, yet would I remain obdurate to her pleadings."

"Very well, I'll go with you, that is, if Miss Trimbley gives permission. I'll have to ask her first."

The girl went into the house, and, in a few minutes came out again. She had put on a hat, a straw hat of large proportions, broad brimmed and trimmed with roses. Her hair was caught up all around her head and stuffed under her hat, so that no one might have told that it was bobbed off at the level of her ears. It was like this that she had appeared to Van Zant at the castle.

"There's one thing I'd like to ask you," said the young man as they drove away from the house. "It isn't a question usually put to ladies, but I don't believe you'll mind it. Joe, how old are you? When you were a boy, I took you to be about fourteen years old. As you are a girl, you must be several years older. You don't mind telling me, do you?"

"Not at all, and you needn't make any excuses for asking. I'm eighteen and three quarters."

"Why so exact about the three quarters?"

"Don't you know that a girl of eighteen always wants to be older, just as a girl of twenty-two or three wants to be younger?"

When they arrived at their shadowy bower in the woods, Christopher took from his pocket his small pair of field glasses, and surveyed the castle and the castle grounds intently.

"There's no one about," he at last declared. "I thought possibly that I might see Mr. Blackstone. It's very strange that I never see him about the building or

the grounds. The only times I have ever seen him have been when he was motoring. The other day when I was trapped in the castle, he didn't appear at all, though I had seen him a half hour before in his car. I wonder what those three servants did with him before they came swarming into the castle?"

"Locked him up somewhere, probably."

"But how could they do it? He must be in a defenseless state of mind and body to enable them to do such a thing."

"Perhaps they've poisoned him with drugs. Perhaps they've hypnotized him."

"You don't believe in hypnotism, do you?"

"I never did before I met that Felix Morel. He's a hypnotist, if there ever was one. There's hypnotism in those close set, steel gray eyes of his. When he looks at you, they seem to bore right through you."

"How do you know? I thought that you had never met any of those three men, that neither of them had ever seen you."

"They never have, at least in the castle. I have met Morel though. It was at a place a good way from here, and several months ago."

"Where and when could you have possibly met him?"

"You'll learn when I tell you my story. I'm not going to speak of incidents out of their turn. I'll tell you now about a lot of things that I've seen and

heard in the castle. In the first place, they bring back a lot of money every time they return from one of their excursions. Oh, heaps and heaps of bank bills tied up in packages. Morel always has it, and he carries it in one of those small, black valises or bags such as expressmen use. When the three servants enter the house, they always go into the library. Morel then dumps the money out of the bag upon the center table, and they count it. Then he ties up the packages again, and takes them upstairs somewhere."

"Where were you when you saw all these things?"

"I was in the small closet under the hall stairway. I've spied upon them from there a number of times. There's a peep hole in the door, about an inch big. I move a slide and it's open or closed. It's so smartly made that you never could discover it from the outside of the door. When the library door is open, and it generally is, I can see from my spy hole right through the library to the far end of it, where Mr. Blackstone's safe is. Two or three times, too, I've seen Felix Morel open Mr. Blackstone's safe by working the combination. He always takes out packages of folded papers, opens and looks them over, puts some of them in his pockets, and returns the others to the safe. They look like stock and bond certificates. I used to live with a farmer and his wife. The old man was well off and had a lot of just such engraved sheets of paper. So I know what they are when I see them. What do you suppose it all means?"

"The meaning is clear enough to me. These rascals are selling Mr. Blackstone's securities and getting the whole thing into ready money. Probably they are preparing to make a quick getaway."

"I've heard them talk, too. Perhaps, if I tell you what they said, it will make the matter clearer. Now you must know that there are a lot of spy holes or peep holes all along the secret passage, both up and down stairs. I suppose those old pirates and smugglers a hundred years ago used them for spying upon their servants to find out if they were loyal. On the first floor the passage runs toward the back of the house between the dining room and the billiard room. In the dining room, to the left of the sideboard hangs the very old and dingy portrait of a beautiful lady. The peep hole is through her eyes. You move a slide, her eyes glide to one side, and your eyes take their place. I declare that if I was in the dining room and saw the lady's eyes move like that, I'd have a conniption fit. In the billiard room, too, are a number of push buttons or round metal plates, strung in a row upon the wall, about five feet from the floor. These buttons are to turn the lights on or off with and to summon the servants from the kitchen and pantry. The peep hole here is through one of those buttons. The button disappears and you look through a small, round hole where the button was. But I was going to tell you about one of their talks.

"One afternoon they came home and, after putting away the money as usual, they went into the dining room, got out a lot of cold food and a number of wine and whiskey bottles, and proceeded to have a regular debauch. Flint drank the most, he was drinking most of the time. The chauffeur, Barry, ran a close second to him, but Morel drank very sparingly. It was a good chance for me to find out something, so I slid back the lady's eyes, and put mine in place of them.

"Say, do I get my third?" presently asked Flint in a maudlin voice.

"Shut up!" answered Morel.

"I want to know if I get my third. Thash what I want to know."

"You'll get just what I said before. I'm going to take a half, each of you will have a quarter."

"That isn't fair," said Barry. "I don't see why I'm not entitled to just as much as you. You couldn't have done anything without me. I'm going to have my third or know the reason why."

"You'll know the reason why just now," answered Morel, slowly and bitingly. "The reason why is that I'll give you a quarter and no more. I don't suppose you'll be fool enough to try and take a third by force, will you?"

"Morel drew a pistol and laid it upon the table at his side. Barry, and Flint looked at each other and relapsed into silence.

"‘For that matter,’ continued Morel, ‘there may not be anything to divide. Flint, you drunken swine, twice already you’ve come near upsetting the whole undertaking by your alcoholic breaks. You do it once more and that will be your finish.’

“At that moment, Jacob Flint sprang up from the table, and looked at the portrait of the lady as if he had seen a ghost.

“‘What’s the matter with you, you drink crazy idiot?’ demanded Morel.

“‘Her eyes, her eyes!’ Flint shouted. ‘I saw them move. I saw them move.’

“‘Of course you saw her eyes move. That’s nothing. Yesterday, you saw some pink elephants, and the day before, some blue snakes. Sit down, I tell you. Sit down, you d—d fool and be quiet.’

“Jacob Flint then sat down. He buried his face in his hands, and seemed to be shaking all over. I wondered what they were talking about, what it was that they were going to divide into halves, thirds and quarters. If, as you say, they are stealing Mr. Blackstone’s stocks and turning them into money, it’s all clear enough.”

“Of course it’s clear enough. These villains are robbing the old man, it must be put a stop to, and the rascals jailed. I will tell you that I came here on this very business. I came to the conclusion that something sinister was about, and my worst suspicions have come

true. I must act in a very few days. Do you think that you can complete your story this afternoon?"

"Oh dear, no. If I tell you everything, we will have to make two afternoons of it."

"Very well. You, really, are more important in my mind than Mr. Blackstone's affairs, and I propose to hear your story, if everything else goes by the board. Let me see, today is Wednesday; on Friday, I shall commence operations. I must go and see the district attorney at Winthrop, and perhaps I'll have to visit the sheriff at the jail in Bedford. I can't tackle these chaps alone. I had a try at it the other day, and it resulted disastrously. Now Joe, dear, suppose you commence."

"I will in a minute. First, though, I must correct you. You say that your fight with those men resulted disastrously. It did for them, but not for you. You certainly did them up completely and properly. Oh, what a fight it was! I saw almost all of it, and I wouldn't have missed it for a farm. Oh, what a fight, what a fight."

Joe went to take her seat upon the fallen tree, but the top of it was so far from the ground that she had some difficulty in getting up. Christopher put his hands under her arm pits, and swung her up quite easily. While he was doing so, he could hardly keep from kissing her. Gyp who had come along in the car, as usual by his own invitation, jumped to the top of the log, and sat down beside her, cocking his head

to one side, and looking up to his mistress as if he meant to hear the story too. Christopher sat cross-legged upon the turf at her feet and Joe, making herself comfortable by leaning back against a large upright branch of a fallen tree, began to tell her story.

CHAPTER XI

WITHOUT A NAME

"As I said before, I am an orphan, and I was brought up in an orphan asylum. I could see that you doubted my word about this, but you shouldn't have done so. At three years of age, which is the earliest time to which my memory goes back, I was an inmate of the Salem girls' orphanage. I don't exactly know how old I was when I was brought to the institution. Probably, though, I was between one and two years old.

"My name was Joe, and that was the only name by which I was ever called. I was brought to the asylum by a woman whose name was Mary MacLaren and, through error, my name was put down in the books as Joe MacLaren. This woman had kept me for several months, partly at her own expense and partly with a small sum of money which had been left by my parents at their death. She was a poor woman and had been forced at last to take me to the orphanage. When she brought me there, she had told the matron my right name, but, as I said before, the woman's

name, by a blunder, had been substituted for mine in the receiving book and my name had been forgotten. I mean to hunt up that Mary MacLaren some time, and find out from her what my name really is.

"I have a very dim and hazy recollection of happenings while I was growing from three to seven. At seven, however, I began to notice and appreciate what was going on about me. There were about fifty little girls in the institution, and, as they took half orphans as well as full orphans, many of the children had either a father or a mother. Those who had no parent, had often relatives, such as uncles and aunts. These relatives would often come to visit the little girls and would bring them toys and other presents. Now and then, too, a parent or relatives would come and take a little girl away. No one though ever came to visit me, or to give me toys. I was the only little girl in that big institution who had absolutely no relatives or friends. When I saw visitors come to the other little girls, it made me feel very sad and lonely, and I have many times crept away to some dark corner and cried my heart out over it.

"One spiteful little girl said to the other girls one day that I never had any father or mother.

"Yes, I did, too," I cried stoutly. "Of course I had a father and mother. I wouldn't have been born if I hadn't had a father and mother."

"'You weren't born at all,' said she. 'You were just found.'

"From the very first, I liked to study, and it was always easy for me to learn. I usually stood at the head of my classes, and I readily went ahead of girls who were much older than I. At eight, besides being very proficient in my other studies, I could read almost anything, even books for grown-ups. I was exceedingly fond of reading. I had no friends or relatives outside of the orphanage, I seemed to be more alone in the world than the other little girls, and in reading I found a refuge and solace. The institution possessed a small but very good library which was used mainly by the matron and the nurses. I actually believe that I had read every volume in that library before I was twelve years old.

"When I was seven or eight years old, I began to dance. There seemed to be a strong and lively impulse hidden somewhere inside of me which made me dance whether I wanted to or no. I could never listen to dance music without wishing to dance. It was funny, wasn't it? Hand organ men used to come and play before a house next door to the orphanage, where there were several children. They never played before the orphanage itself, because the orphans of course never have any pennies. A summer-house, or pavilion, stood in the grounds of the asylum, quite near the house, in front of which the organ grinder usually played, and it was on the floor of this summer-house that I always danced. I invented my own dances,

and they must have been very quaint and funny to look at. I'm certain of one thing, though, I'm certain that I kept very good time. I, of course, always had a large and appreciative audience of orphans. All of them stared at me with wondering eyes, many of them clapped their hands, and some of them now and then, would try to join in, but their success was poor compared to mine. When I was eight or nine years of age, there came to me one of the greatest sorrows of my life. I can hardly speak of it now without crying. If tears come to my eyes, you mustn't think I'm foolish.

"As I was standing inside of the iron street fence one day, looking over into the street, with my hands and chin upon the pickets, a farmer came driving by in a wagon. When he saw me standing by the fence, he stopped his horse.

"'Say, little girl,' he called out, 'do you want a kitten?'

"I said 'yes,' of course. Then he got down off the wagon, felt around in a basket for a moment, and brought out a small kitten, two or three months old, and handed it over the fence to me. It was a black and white kitten, with a black nose, and it had the funniest face you ever saw. It would make you laugh every time you looked at him.

"'He's a Tommy,' called out the farmer, as he mounted his wagon and drove away. I didn't know

that he referred to the kitten's sex, and thought that Tommy was the kitten's name. So he bore the name of 'Tommy' from that day to the day of his death.

"I went to the woodshed at the rear of the building, found a small, wooden box and a ragged piece of carpet, put Tommy into the box, and put the box under the stairway. Now I was indeed happy. It was the first really happy moment I had ever known. Now I had something to love and to pet, a small living creature that was all my own. My next business was to provide a commisariat. I went to the cook, who was a stout, easy going person, and laid the matter before her.

"'Good Heavens, child,' she said, 'Miss Rogers, the matron, will never allow you to keep a cat.'

"But he's such a tiny bit of a one," I urged. "Besides, he'll keep the mice and rats away."

"Perhaps so, though I don't think that he'd cut much of a figger with a good-sized rat. I've been troubled with mice though lately, and p'raps he'll scare 'em away. I'll tell Mrs. Rogers so, if she says anything. I think I can give you some scraps or bones for him now and then, and I'll give you a saucer of milk for him now.'

"I took the saucer of milk to the woodshed, and while Tommy was lapping it up, I experienced a feeling of delightful satisfaction.

"During the next three months, I devoted all my

spare time to Tommy's education. I taught him to sit up and beg, with a great deal of pains and trouble. At first I had to hold him up, but finally, when it dawned upon his small brain that a reward for it was always coming, he sat up himself without persuasion. I also taught him to chase a paper ball and to bring it to me. Any cat will chase a paper ball, but bringing it back is an entirely different thing, and is an accomplishment few cats possess. After his education in these important matters was satisfactorily finished, I used often to put him through his tricks to an admiring audience of little girls.

"Mrs. Rogers, without doubt, soon heard of Tommy's existence, but she was a good, motherly, rather indolent, stout lady, well past her prime, and she turned a blind eye toward this flagrant infraction of the rules. The assistant matron, Miss Hanchett, though, was an entirely different person. She was big, angular and ugly. She had a bad temper and a mean disposition. One day several bottles of milk, just left by the milkman, stood upon the back steps of the orphanage. Tommy spied them and, during the course of his investigations, upset one of them, knocked the cap off the bottle, and spilled the contents over the steps. During the next five minutes, he was the busiest cat ever.

"Just at that moment, Miss Hanchett came out of the door and caught Tommy in the midst of his depredations. Saying nothing, she picked him up, went

to the laundry, where there stood a tub of water, and held the poor little kitten under the water until he was dead. The worst of it was that I had to witness the whole thing. I ran after her to the laundry, and clutching her hands and arms, tried to pull them back, but what could my puny strength avail against her? She only gave a cruel laugh, and held on until Tommy was drowned. Then she took his poor little drowned body and threw it in the ash can. All I could do was to stand there and burst into an agony of tears.

“When the woman was gone, I stole to the ash can, lifted the lid, and took out the pitiful, soaked and be-draggled body. I found a paper box, and put him in it. Then, several other little girls helping me, I scooped out a tiny grave under a big elm tree at the back of the asylum grounds, and we buried poor Tommy. One of the little girls said a prayer, I don’t remember what it was, but I don’t think that it was very appropriate. All I could do was to weep. For months afterwards I was very sad, I had fits of thinking about that poor little drowned kitten, and many and many is the tear that I shed in consequence.

“Kit, I do actually believe that you are about to cry yourself. There seem to be tears in the corner of your eyes.”

“I own up guilty,” confessed the young man, laughing. “It is your fault. You would make anybody weep by telling such tragic tales. Besides, I never

could stand to have children and small animals abused."

"When I came to be ten years old," said Joe, continuing her narrative, "I was called before Mrs. Rogers, the matron, and told that I was to be put to work."

"'You are getting to be quite a big and strong little girl now,' said she, 'and it is time that you began doing something toward your support. Idleness is the worst possible thing for girls of your age, and a regular and constant occupation will be greatly to your advantage.'

"The next morning, according to the matron's decision, I went into one of the wards or dormitories, and commenced to assist the maid or attendant in her care of the little ones under her charge. It was a small dormitory, it contained eight small beds, and eight little girls slept in them. The attendant and I got the children up in the morning, washed them, combed their hair and dressed them. At night we undressed them, put on their nighties, saw that they said their prayers, and tucked them up in bed. After they were in bed, we mended and put buttons on their clothes, and made everything ready for the next day.

"The attendant in charge of this dormitory was a cross, lazy young woman, whose name was Anna Littlejohn. She spent a great deal of the time in a rocking chair, in a small windowed alcove at the end of the dormitory reading trashy paper-covered novels. She was very irritable with the children, and often cuffed and struck them, so that scarcely an evening passed,

without some of the little tots crying themselves to sleep. I was very much wrought up about the matter, I can tell you. I resolved to put an end to such a state of things, and after a great deal of thought, I came to a very simple solution of the difficulty. I would prevent her from maltreating the little girls by doing all the work myself.

"Miss Littlejohn," said I, one night, "there's no use in your fussing about the children at all. I love to take care of them, and I can do the whole thing without the least bit of trouble. You just sit down in your rocker, and read your book. If I don't do things right, tell me. Now you just sit down and watch me, and see how easily I can do the whole thing."

"'All right,' said she, very much pleased. 'If you're dying to do all the work for these brats, you're welcome to it. If you run up against something you can't do, call me. Now go to it, kid.'

"With that, she sat down on her chair, from which she never moved all evening. Furthermore, she never interfered with me, and, for the first time, all my eight little charges went happily to bed. I was so kind and gentle and sympathetic with them that they soon began to love me, and finally they did two-thirds of the work themselves. They would actually dress and undress themselves all alone, that is to say, all but the back buttons. Meanwhile, every night and morning, Miss

Littlejohn sat in her rocker and read, never moving from her chair, save when the matron made her rounds, when she would jump up, and fly about with a great appearance of industry. The children's appearance began to improve greatly when Miss Littlejohn left them alone, and the matron complimented the attendant several times on this account. I wish you could have seen me go through the ceremony of putting the children to bed. In the first place, I told them a story. That was always expected. I sat on a hassock, and the little tots sat in a circle about me upon the floor. I told them all kinds of children's stories. I had always a good memory, and my brain was well stocked with them. I told them the stories of Snow White, The Sleeping Princess, Cinderella, Hop o' my Thumb, Little Red Riding Hood, Jack, the Giant Killer, The Babes in the Wood, Alice in Wonderland, Alladin and the Wonderful Lamp, Hansel and Gretel and The Three Bears. I told them those little bed-time stories about Peter Rabbit, Danny Meadow Mouse, Reddy the Fox, Hooty the Owl and Paddy Beaver. I told them every fairy and children's story you ever heard of. When I couldn't think of any story to tell them, I made up a story out of my own mind. I made up some quite awfully good stories myself, I can assure you.

"After the story was told, I undressed them, or rather helped them to undress, put on their nighties and had them say their prayers. I had them say

different prayers. One night one prayer, another night another prayer, one night, 'Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep,' the next night, 'Jesus Ever Meek and Mild,' or 'Savior at Thy Feet I Kneel.' Some of the littlest girls always wanted to say their prayers at my knee. After saying their prayers, they jumped into their small beds, and I tucked them in, and kissed them. If I didn't kiss them, they wouldn't go to sleep. Sometimes they would call me back to kiss them over again.

"Many times I had spent many sad hours in thinking that I had never had a mother. Kit, have you ever thought how sorrowful it must be not to have had a mother's care and love?"

"I have never thought about it much, as I had no need to. I had the best mother in all the world. She's dead now, but I shall think of her and love her as long as I live."

"Oh, Kit, how fortunate you are. Even though your mother is dead, you still have her memory to love and cherish. It must be a great and wonderful thing in your life. Thinking about it so much, I finally hit upon an idea which would give me some sort of satisfaction and happiness. If I couldn't have a mother, I would be a mother myself. I began then to imagine that the eight little girls in my charge were really and truly my children. Everything which I did for them after that was done with the idea of the best thing which a mother might do for her daughters.

In the first place, their names were all very common and prosaic, and I christened them all anew. I called them Rosalind, Eleanor, Clarice, Gladys, Marianna, Ophelia, Constance and Sophronia.

“I began to imagine what their future would be. Rosalind must be a musician, Eleanor a linguist, Clarice a dancer, and so on with the rest of them. Marianna would marry a lawyer, Ophelia a doctor and Constance a minister. I could never make up my mind though which of my daughters I would live with when they were grown up.”

“Did it ever occur to you, Joe, dear,” asked Christopher, “that some young man might come along, and fall in love with you and marry you, and that you would have to live with him, instead of with your daughters?”

“I never thought about that.”

“Such a thing would be very likely to happen with a girl who was an angel, especially when the girl is a very beautiful angel.”

CHAPTER XII

THE ST. AGNES HOME

"None of the girls were allowed to remain in the orphanage after they were twelve years old. When they attained that age, a place was found for them, and they had to go out to work. It was easy to dispose of the girls, as many people came to the asylum and asked for them. It was usually a farmer and his wife who had no children. They would tell how lonely their home was without the sound of children's voices, how they wanted a youngster to brighten it up, and how they would be father and mother to the child. When though, they secured the little girl, they took her home and made her work like fury.

"I was saved from this fate by a very fortunate chance. One of the managers of the orphanage, a very kind lady, had taken a great interest in me. She didn't want to see me go out to work and be abused, as is the way with most orphans, and exerting herself in my favor, she secured for me a place in another charitable institution where they kept girls for a much longer time. The name of this institution was 'The

St. Agnes Home for Orphan Girls.' They took girls of twelve years of age, and kept them until they were sixteen. It was a small institution and the capacity was limited to twenty girls. It was conducted under the patronage of the Protestant Episcopal Church, it was managed by a guild or society of that church, called St. Agnes Guild, and it was supported by the different churches of the diocese.

"When I came to leave the Salem orphanage, I found it very hard to part from my eight little girls. They cried as if their very hearts would break; the matron, Mrs. Rogers, also shed tears, and as for myself, I boohooed shamefully. Would you believe it, three or four of the tots brought me some toy or other as a parting gift. Rosalind, a little lame girl, whose right name was Annie Snyder, gave me a dilapidated doll, who had only half a head and but one leg. I was very much delighted and touched by their gifts, and well I might be, as the poor little things had given me their most cherished possessions, in fact had given me all that they had. Of course, though, I gave the things back to the matron, when the children weren't looking. Those little dears must have loved me a lot. A week or so after I had left the orphanage and gone to the St. Agnes Home, two of them ran away and set out all by themselves to find me. The attendants searched the countryside all afternoon for them, and late at night, found them asleep by

the roadside, in the angle of a rail fence, clasped in each other's arms.

"St. Agnes Home was a very splendid charity. It was a sensible and beautiful institution and was really and truly a home for the twenty girls which it sheltered. Here it was that I really began to live, and here it was that I passed the happiest years of my none too happy life. A very excellent school was conducted in the institution. You will have an idea of how excellent it was when I tell you that several girls, the daughters of rich parents, came to the school from outside, and paid a high price for their tuition. The school had one head teacher, a Miss Griscom, who was a graduate of one of the large women's colleges, and there were also four other teachers, four spinster ladies, who belonged to the Guild of St. Agnes, who were called 'Deaconesses,' and who were very much like the Sisters of Charity, who gave their services for nothing. One of them taught higher mathematics, another French, another German, and another English literature. If there was ever a chance to learn anything, I wanted to learn it. I have always felt that way, so I needn't tell you that I took full advantage of the great opportunity which was offered me.

"St. Agnes Home possessed a large library of the best books in the world. I think that it must have contained fully three thousand volumes. I revelled in the treasures of that library as a miser revels in his piles

of gold. The books were all so good that one couldn't go amiss. They were free to all, reading them in our hours of relaxation was much encouraged by our teachers, and I was scarcely ever without one in my hand. The matron or, as she was called, the 'superintendent' of the home, a Miss Jamison, noticing that I was so fond of books, took pains to give me advice about the choice of them. Often, also, she would have me read aloud to her, and would correct my pronunciation and emphasis, with the result that I became quite a proficient reader, so that I was able to give her and others a good deal of pleasure. A great intimacy sprang up between the old lady and myself. I would sit upon a hassock at her feet and read to her, and she would stroke my head or pat my cheek. I never was happier than when I was with that dear, dear lady.

"There were two girls of those who came from outside to the school who became very friendly with me. Their names were Marcia Mercer and Stella Anderson. Marcia was a very ladylike and lovely girl. Stella was a good, warm-hearted girl, but she was a very slangy girl, and she smoked cigarettes on the sly. It would fairly shock you to hear the slang that Stella used. She couldn't speak a dozen words without it. The teachers held her up as a horrible example to the rest of the girls. We all knew that it was very wrong, yet we were all thrilled with the audacity and originality of her phrases.

"Both Marcia Mercer and Stella Anderson, I am very sorry to say, were very lazy girls, and they would not, or could not study their lessons as they should. The consequence was that I often did their exercises or made their translations for them. I suppose that it was wrong for me to thus encourage them in their delinquency, but I always felt a great joy in doing things for other people, and I simply had to help them. Then, too, they were both so kind and affectionate to me that I felt that I had to do something in return. Oh, those were very happy days for me. I don't know how it was, it was very strange, but everybody seemed to love me."

"It wasn't strange at all," interrupted Christopher. "It would have been strange, indeed, if there had been a single person of all those who ever knew you, who didn't love you. I know how it must have been from my own experience."

"Nonsense, Kit! You mustn't say such foolish things. Besides, you are interrupting me, and I will lose the thread of my story. I almost forgot to tell you about my dancing. Of course, as always before, I danced whenever and wherever I could. It was in my blood, and it was a part of my very being. I simply had to. All the girls soon found out about it, I had improved wonderfully by much practice, I had made it something of an art, and I always had a delighted audience. Marcia Mercer brought to the school a small

phonograph which looked like one of those square coffee mills, set it up in the gymnasium, a large detached building at the back of the grounds, and there, during recess, or after school hours, I danced every kind of a dance that would go with the music.

"All the girls kept very quiet about it, with the fear of incurring Miss Jamison's displeasure, as she was a lady of very strict religious notions, and they were sure that she would disapprove of such a profligate amusement. One afternoon, after I had been dancing quite a while, I looked up and saw the dear old lady standing in the open doorway watching me. I stopped at once very much confused, but she came over to me, and instead of scolding me she put her arm about me in the kindest way.

"'I see,' said she, 'that my little girl has another accomplishment beside the many which I knew she possessed. All that I ask of you, Joe dear, is that you always devote this gift to worthy purposes, that you never degrade it, or make it common and vulgar.'

"Marcia Mercer, one Saturday afternoon, invited me to go home with her and take supper and spend the evening. She told me, too, that her parents wanted very much to have me come. So, having asked and obtained Miss Jamison's permission, I made my toilet with great care, put an extra ribbon in my hair, and went with Marcia to her home. I wore the uniform which was always worn by the orphan girls of the

home, which consisted of a gray linen gown trimmed with white braid and a gray cap or sunbonnet. Marcia, however, when we arrived at her house, made me put on one of her beautiful gowns. I looked at myself in the glass, and I was confronted by such a fashionable creature, that I thought at first that it must be some other person.

"Marcia's parents were very kind to me, and did everything they could to make me feel at home. Marcia had a younger sister, named Elsie, a pretty little thing, whom I loved the moment I saw her. She seemed to take a great fancy to me, also; Marcia had a brother, too, a young man of twenty-six whom I didn't like so well. After we had eaten the most magnificent dinner that I ever sat down to in my life, though I suppose that it was nothing beyond their usual fare, Mrs. Mercer asked me to dance, and of course I consented at once. When a person is able to do something which gives pleasure to others, she shouldn't wait to be urged and entreated, thus making it look as if she were trying to enhance the value of her accomplishment. Marcia played upon the player piano several kinds of dances, Spanish, Polish, Hungarian and Russian, and I did the very best I knew, the consequence being that I pleased my audience immensely. Marcia's mother kissed me, called me a 'dear girl,' and said that I must come to see them many times.

"I did go to Marcia's house once more, but that

was all. When I came this second time, and Marcia had again decked me out in one of her pretty dresses, and we had come down into the parlor, I found, beside the family, a dozen strangers awaiting me. I was very much embarrassed and taken aback, but they were all so sympathetic and kindly that I soon got over my confusion. Of course they had been given very highly colored reports of my ability, and they had all come to see me dance. I tried very hard not to disappoint them, and I think that I really pleased them, for they kept me dancing and dancing until I almost fell down from fatigue.

“Marcia’s brother, Sidney, whom I spoke of before, was the cause of my never going again to visit Marcia. He followed me everywhere about the house. When he thought that no one was looking, he would try to kiss me, or put his arm around me, and he was continually saying foolish and sentimental things. He was too, too ——.”

“Mushy,” suggested Christopher.

“That’s it exactly. He was too mushy. That was the reason that I couldn’t go any more to Marcia’s house. In the first place, I didn’t like him. In the second place, I knew that his attentions to me would be noticed, and that his father and mother would think that I had encouraged him, and that I was trying to ensnare him. The worst of it was that I couldn’t tell Marcia my reasons for refusing her repeated invitations.

She became cold and distant to me, and it gave me many sorrowful moments.

"I want to say some more about Miss Jamison, the superintendent of the home. I wish I could tell you how good and motherly and sweet she always was to me. She was the best friend that I ever had in all my life, up to that time. I won't say that she was a better woman than Miss Trimbey. That couldn't be. But she was just as good. She had me spend a lot of time with her, and those were certainly happy, happy hours. One Christmas she gave me a ten dollar gold piece.

"'Joe,' said she, 'you mustn't spend this money, at least while you are here in the home. After you leave us and go out into the world, there may come a time when it will mean the difference between happiness and misfortune.'

"I put the gold piece one side, and vowed to myself that I would never spend it at all, that I would always treasure it as a memento of my one best friend. Afterward, though, there came a time when I was forced to spend it, and I found that it really did make the difference which she anticipated.

"Shortly after this Christmas, Miss Jamison, who had always been a somewhat fragile and delicate person, fell really ill and was obliged to take to her bed. Instead of improving, she gradually declined and wasted away, and then the day came when her physician

said she could not live. I remember that day well. I remember what a gloom there was upon the house, and how terribly sad we all felt. When it was given out that there was no hope for the poor lady, four of her relatives, a man and three women, her nephew, sister and two nieces, came from their several abodes and camped in the home. Miss Jamison had a little property, I think that it was only a very small property, but their interest in it seemed none the less vital because of its insignificance. They usually sat in the room next to the one in which their relative lay dying, and they glared at each other much like hungry and ill-tempered dogs who are waiting for a bone to be thrown out of a kitchen.

"When it came to Miss Jamison's last hour, the nurses and doctor asked her if there was anybody she wished to see, and she named one person only. Kit, who was that person, can you guess?"

"Of course I can, Joe, dear, she wanted to see the best, the sweetest and loveliest being on earth, and that was you."

"Kit, you know that I am nothing of the kind. But, all the same, I it was whom she wanted to see, and to say good-bye to. When I passed through the ante-chamber, where sat her four relatives, they stared at me malevolently, as if they thought that I was trying to deprive them of their inheritance. Poor, miserable souls, they couldn't imagine how I could

love Miss Jamison, and have no thought of gain for myself.

“When I came to my friend’s bedside, she was very near her end. I held her hands, and she said a few affectionate things to me. At the last moment, I kissed her, she gave me a tender, far-seeing look, her eyelids closed, and so she passed out. It was many a day before I could think of her without the tears coming fast.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE UNLUCKY CHAPTER

“A few months after Miss Jamison’s death, I was sixteen years old, and the time had come for me to leave St. Agnes Home. You can imagine how sad was the thought of leaving all my friends, and going out into the world with strangers. One day there came to the home a farmer and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Silas Ryder, in quest of a girl. Mr. Ryder was a prosperous, genial, well-dressed man, and his wife a kind and motherly appearing woman. When they saw me, they seemed to take an instant liking to me.

“‘I want her more for a companion than anything else,’ said Mrs. Ryder to the new superintendent. ‘We have never had any children, and our house has always been lonesome on that account. You say that Joe has never known any parents? That is very sad, indeed, and we shall certainly try to make her forget the lack of them. Joe, I will be a good mother to you, never fear, and you will never regret going with us.’

“She put her arms about me and kissed me, and I felt very much comforted at thinking what a good home

I was going to have, and what dear, kind people had taken me up.

"I got my small belongings together, kissed everybody good-bye, and set out with Mr. and Mrs. Ryder in a spring wagon for their home. They owned a farm of a hundred acres or more, which was situated on the edge of a village about ten miles from Salem. As soon as we arrived, and while Mr. Ryder was putting up the horse, Mrs. Ryder took me into the house, and gave me a long talk. Her motherly tone and manner had completely vanished, and my hopes of a happy future quickly faded.

"I am going to have a good plain talk with you," said she. "It will prevent future misunderstandings, and do away with any false ideas which you may have formed. Of course, you understand that we did not take you from that home from motives simply of charity, and that we shall expect you to earn your living. I will give you to start with a sort of general outline of your duties. You will get up at six o'clock in the morning, bring up coal and kindling from the cellar, make a fire in the kitchen stove, also, if necessary, in the parlor stove. You then set about getting breakfast. When breakfast is about ready, you will join Mr. Ryder and myself in the parlor for prayers. You will then put the breakfast on the table, and Mr. Ryder and I will eat. After we have eaten, and you have cleared away the things, I will come into the

kitchen and lay out what food is necessary for your own breakfast. Between breakfast and dinner time, you will wash the dishes, clean the dining room and kitchen, sweep what other rooms need sweeping, black the cook stove, clean and fill the lamps, sweep the porches and the walks, make the beds, and set the table for dinner. Afternoons you will wash the dinner dishes, dust the furniture and woodwork and perhaps clean windows. After you have washed the supper dishes, and put everything away, you can do mending or some other light work. If everything is finished by eight o'clock, you can rest. You will notice that I have said nothing about washing, ironing or scrubbing. Mrs. Briggs, a poor widow who lives nearby, comes two days a week to wash, iron and scrub. Mr. Ryder has a mortgage on her place, and as she can't possibly pay all the interest, we are kind enough to take part of it out in work. That will make things very easy for you, Joe, and I hope that you will appreciate this lightening of your task. Of course, we can't pay you any wages, at least for the first two or three years. Everything is very high, owing to the war, and it will cost us a lot of money to lodge you, keep you warm and board you. What you will absolutely need in clothing I think I can provide from some of my own things which I can no longer wear.'

"After listening to this long catalogue of my duties, my future looked to me very dark indeed. I had,

however, one consolation. The cloud had a silver lining after all. I didn't have to do the washing, ironing or floor scrubbing. I was very glad to hear it, though I was sorry for poor Mrs. Briggs. I have always wanted to keep my hands soft, smooth and white. If I had done Mrs. Brigg's work, I couldn't have kept them so. As it is, I have done fairly well."

Joe held up her small, white hands, and gazed at them with satisfaction.

"Let me see one of them," asked Christopher.

She held a hand down to him, and he took it, looked at it lovingly and squeezed it slightly. Suddenly, he raised it to his lips.

"That's the way they do in the moving pictures," said he. "I always thought that it was silly until now. Now I can see why they do it."

"It's silly enough, I'm sure," said Joe, drawing away her hand and blushing. "I must get on with my story. Mr. Ryder was a very rich man for a farmer but, as you have doubtless already concluded, he was very miserly. I think that he and his wife were the stingiest people I ever knew. They set a good table for themselves, but Mrs. Ryder would give me scarcely any of the nice things which they ate, and what she did give me was in quite small portions. Kit, I have a confession to make. I do like to eat good things. I am not one of those namby pamby girls who peck away ever so lightly at their regular food, and make

up for it on candy and pickles. I do full justice always to my meals, I assure you. I was always hungry when I lived with the Ryders. During the two years that I was with them, I don't believe that I ever really had all I wanted to eat. You ought to see the difference at Miss Trimbey's house. The trouble there is that you are expected to eat too much. If I come to the table with a poorer appetite than usual, if my eating is not quite up to the average, Miss Trimbey and Susan at once declare that I must be sick, and both become very anxious about me.

"My one recreation during all the time that I was a member of the Ryder household was that of reading. If I couldn't have read, I would have wanted to die. The Ryders had very few books, and those which they had were not such as I cared to read. There was a good public library in the village nearby, and I borrowed my books there. I had to have a membership card endorsed by a tax-payer of the town, and Mr. Ryder consented to be my sponsor.

"'You see, Joe,' said he, 'that I am willing to do anything for you which is prudent and proper. I hope you will appreciate the fact, and show your appreciation by an increase of activity and industry. In signing your card I make one proviso. It is our rule that the lights shall be out and everybody in bed at nine o'clock. You will perhaps wish to read a bit later than that. I am willing that you should do so, but

it will be only fair that you pay for the extra quantity of oil which you use. They told me at the home that Miss Jamison had given you a sum of money, and that you still have that money in your possession. You will, therefore, be able to pay me the small amount which will be due me.'

"I agreed, of course, to his proposition, and commenced at once to borrow books from the town library. I usually sat up and read until ten or eleven o'clock, and every week Mr. Ryder figured out carefully the extra amount of oil which I had used, and charged me accordingly. The sums which I paid him were small, perhaps only a few cents a week, but the aggregate was so much, that I only had three or four dollars left of my ten dollar gold piece at the end of my two years' stay at the Ryder house. I now come to the events which caused me to run away."

"You have told me about it already, Joe, dear," interposed Christopher.

"Yes, I know, but I told you a big fib, Kit. I also told Miss Trimbley another. It really didn't do any harm, and if I had told you the truth, I would have had to tell you at the same time that I was a girl instead of a boy. I told Miss Trimbley that I surprised a burglar while he was opening Mr. Ryder's safe, that he seized me by the throat and threatened to kill me, if I ever told about him, that I afterward met the man several times, and that I finally ran away because I

was so afraid of him. I told you that Mrs. Ryder had lost a lot of money playing cards, that she took the money from her husband's safe to pay her gambling debts with, and that she laid the robbery to me, when Mr. Ryder discovered his loss. Well, it was true that I surprised a burglar at the farmer's safe, but the rest of my story to Miss Trimbley was pure romance. The man sprang up when he saw me, jumped through the window, without my catching a look at his face, and that was the last I ever heard of him. It was also true that Mrs. Ryder played cards for money, and that she had recourse to Mr. Ryder's safe. Though she was the stingiest woman ever, she had the gambling habit fixed upon her, and couldn't keep from card playing with the women of her club. She and her husband used to quarrel about it continually. So you see that my stories were not made up altogether out of whole cloth. Well, now I'll tell you why I ran away.

"One morning I was sitting in the kitchen paring apples for dinner. It was a pleasant day of early June and the sunshine streamed through the windows, making the room light and cheerful. Suddenly a shadow fell upon the floor, and looking up, I saw a man standing outside of one of the windows, resting his elbows upon the sill and staring at me.

"He was a well-dressed man of thirty. He had slim, white hands, closely set gray eyes, and a dark beard trimmed into two points. He was smiling or

rather grinning at me, and I noticed that he had very white, even teeth."

"Do you know, Joe," interrupted Christopher, "that your description would fit Morel to a nicety? I couldn't describe Morel any more closely, if I tried. The coincidence is funny, isn't it?"

"There's nothing funny about it, and there's no coincidence, because the man I saw was Morel, himself. I told you a while ago that I had met him before. This occasion was the one I meant. Annoyed and embarrassed by the man's looking at me, I cast down my eyes, and went on paring my apples, thinking that he would go away. Seeing that he had no intention of leaving, and that he stared at me harder than ever, I got up, and left the room. There was something wicked, yet fascinating about the look in his eyes, and his white, even teeth seemed cruel and carnivorous. I was very much frightened, yet I could not have told why.

"When Mr. and Mrs. Ryder sat down to the dinner table, and I went to carry in the dinner, I was astonished to see, sitting at the table with them, like an old acquaintance, the man who had been looking at me through the window. You can imagine my wonder and consternation."

"'Joe,' said Mrs. Ryder, 'this is Mr. Morel, a friend of ours. He has come quite a distance, and is looking for a girl to help his wife in the house. He is

quite pleased with your appearance, and with our recommendation, and we have arranged to have you go with him.'

"But I don't want to go with him," I stammered.
"I would rather stay here."

"You can see, Kit, how scared I was by Morel, when I preferred to stay with those awfully mean Ryders, rather than go with him.

"I'm sorry to say," answered Mrs. Ryder, "that you can't stay with us any longer. Mrs. Briggs doesn't pay any more interest on Mr. Ryder's mortgage, so she'll have to come here altogether, and do all our work. Naturally, we can't afford to keep two girls, so you will have to go. Mr. Morel has a lovely wife and a beautiful home. We think that we have done very nicely by you in getting you such a splendid place."

"I don't care to go with Mr. Morel," I repeated, tremblingly, "I'd rather get a place somewhere in the village."

"You can't get a place in the village. If you are ungrateful enough to refuse this fine position, which we have been to so much trouble to get for you, I shall certainly give you no recommend. Without a recommend, you can't get a place, and you will be thrown upon the town. Mr. Morel will call for you with his automobile at about four o'clock, so dress yourself as well as possible, and hold yourself in readiness. You need not pack your things, as you will not have to take them.

They don't amount to much anyway, and I may have other use for them. Mr. Morel is going to stop on the way to his home, and buy you such clothes as you have immediate use for. Mrs. Morel, when you arrive, will provide you with a whole new outfit.'

"Mr. Morel, whose baleful eyes had never left my face, and who still wore that exasperating smile, now spoke for the first time.

"'Joe,' said he, with a familiarity which put me to shame, 'don't let your foolish girl notions influence you against me. You never have seen me before, and you can certainly have nothing against me. When you come to my house, Mrs. Morel will greet you with a mother's kindness, and you will find there a delightful and happy home.'

"I had heard that talk about a mother's kindness before, and some instinct told me that he was lying. But what could I do? These three purposeful, resolute people were against me, and so I gave in.

"At four o'clock, Mr. Morel arrived at the house with his car, and Mrs. Ryder, taking me by the wrist with no uncertain grasp, led me out and put me into it. The door of the car shut with a bang, and I felt somehow that I was a prisoner. Our way led through the village. When we had come to the building which held the office of the town clerk, Morel stopped the car.

"'We go in here,' said he.

"While I was with him, and while those gray

eyes of his were upon me, I was absolutely under his domination. I have told you before that I thought he was a hypnotist. He certainly exerted a very strange and powerful influence upon me. When he told me to come with him, I got out of the car, and followed him meekly into the town clerk's office. There Morel asked for and obtained some kind of a law blank, which he proceeded to fill out. When he had finished writing he placed the document upon the table before me.

“‘This is a mutual employer’s and employee’s agreement,’ said he. ‘Sign your name down here upon this line.’

“I took the pen which he gave me, and obediently signed my name upon the line indicated. Then Morel had the town clerk take my affidavit, after which, we left the office and again mounted his car. Presently we passed up a side street, and stopped in front of a minister’s house. The minister’s name was ‘Rev. James C. Hyatt.’ I remember how his name looked upon a brass plate beside the door.

“‘Joe,’ said Morel, with another of his baleful smiles, boring into me with his closely set eyes, ‘we will now come to an understanding. I didn’t take you away from those beggarly Ryders to make a servant and a slave of you. I have something far better and more pleasant in store for you. I am going to give you a happy and luxurious life. That silly romance about my wife was all humbug. I haven’t any wife. Joe, I’m going to marry you.’

CHAPTER XIV

FRENCH LEAVE

"But I don't want to marry you," I cried, panic-stricken. "I don't want to marry at all."

"Yes, you do. You only think you don't. That was a marriage license which you just signed, so of course you mean to marry me. You do mean to marry me, don't you Joe?"

"He came closer and gazed steadily and compellingly into my eyes. I felt my will power weaken. I seemed to be dazed and somewhat sleepy.

"Yes," I answered, feebly.

"We mounted the steps of the porch, and were admitted to the house and shown into the parlor by a maid servant. Pretty soon the Reverend Mr. Hyatt came into the room.

"This young lady and I are here to be married," announced Morel. "First, though, I would like to have a minute's private talk with you."

"The minister took Morel into a small room across the hall. This was Morel's fatal blunder. As long as he had me under his eye, he could do anything he

wanted with me. Once out of his sight, I seemed to recover my faculties, and the spell was broken. I cast about for a way of escape, and my glance rested upon the back windows of the parlor. Beyond the windows I could see a garden and an orchard, and my mind was made up at once. I went to one of the windows, opened it carefully, squirmed over the sill, and still keeping the sash in place, slid to the ground, closing the window after me.

“I darted across the garden, climbed a fence and got into the orchard. The trees were small and set closely together, so that they soon hid me completely from the house. After leaving the orchard, I crossed a pasture in which there were a lot of cows, and entered a large piece of woods. I made up my mind to get as far away from the Ryder’s house as possible, and I concluded that it would be better for me to keep to the fields and woods, rather than to travel by the highways, where Morel might easily follow and recapture me.

“Having chosen what I thought was the right direction, I set out at a fast pace, and tramped through lots of woods, pastures, meadows and fields. I think that I must have climbed at least a hundred fences. When I came to a barbed wire fence, I would lie down on the ground and roll under it. Pretty soon, the night came down, and then I must have lost my way. At last, utterly worn out, I came to a large hay stack, as

big as a house, and pulling some of the hay down upon the ground, I lay upon it, in the lee of the stack, and went to sleep. When I awoke, it was morning, and the sun was shining in my face. A man was bending over and looking at me. It was Mr. Ryder. I had become turned about, had traveled in a circle, and had brought up at the Ryder farm, the place which I had left at four o'clock.

“‘Hullo!’ he exclaimed. ‘What are you doing here? Where did you leave Mr. Morel? What did you come back to us for, you confounded little tramp?’

“I didn’t mean to come back to you,” I answered, pleadingly, as I got to my feet. “Indeed I didn’t. I meant to go to some other town, but I lost my way.”

“That’s a likely tale. We do our best to get rid of you, and back you come like a stray cat. Now come up to the house, and I’ll send for Morel. If you think you can get away with this trick, you’re mistaken.”

“I don’t want to come up to the house. I’m going down to the village, and I promise you that you shall never see me again.”

“You’re not going to the house, hey? Well, we’ll see about that.”

“He took me by the arm with a grip that hurt, and pulled me along toward the house. I struggled with him, but he became very violent and cruel, so that I had to give up, and allow myself to be led captive. When we came to the house, Mrs. Ryder was standing upon the porch.

" 'See what I found, sleeping behind the hay stack in the ten acre,' he cried out to her. 'She evidently slipped away from Morel in some manner, and now we have her on our hands again.'

" 'The wretched little hussy!' exclaimed his wife. 'She ought to have a good trouncing, that she ought, and I've a good mind to give it to her. Never mind, we'll shut her up, and send for Mr. Morel again.'

" 'You mustn't do that,' I cried. "He took me away from here by a trick. He hasn't any wife at all, and he doesn't want me for a housemaid. He wants to marry me. You mustn't let an unmarried man take me away like that alone. It isn't right.'

" 'It isn't right, hey? You foundling, you nameless brat, do you pretend to teach me what's right and what's wrong? Suppose Mr. Morel hasn't a wife, and suppose he does want to marry you. What could you ask for better? Ninety-nine girls out of a hundred would jump at the chance to marry such a handsome and distinguished gentleman. Come along now upstairs to your room. I'll see you safely under lock and key, and there you'll stay until we can get rid of you for good.'

" I was about to protest, but she seized me by the wrist, and dragged me upon the porch and into the house.

" 'Better go quietly,' threatened her husband. 'You know what you'll get, if you don't.'

"I went meekly with Mrs. Ryder up the stairs, and back through the hall to my little room over the kitchen. The woman went outside, and locked the door. I listened to her footsteps descending the back stairway, and then I threw myself upon my hard, narrow bed and gave way to despairing tears. About two hours later, Mrs. Ryder brought me some bread and a cup of coffee.

"'I suppose that we mustn't starve you, though you deserve it well enough,' was her unpleasant greeting.

"After a while, I got up and sat by the open window. I had resolved to die, rather than to marry a man I hated and despised. I didn't know how I was to die. That didn't matter, I was going to die, anyway. I looked mournfully at the blue sky, the white clouds, the fields and the woods. If I was going to die, I wouldn't be able to see them very much longer. Pretty soon the voices of Mr. and Mrs. Ryder came up to me from the kitchen, the windows of which were also open. I could make out very little of their talk, but one sentence came to me quite distinctly.

"'The worst of it is this:' The man was speaking. 'If we can't get her to marry him, we'll have to give the money back.'

"They've sold me to him," I said to myself with conviction. "They were lying about his having a wife and about his wanting me to help her. They've

sold me to him like a sheep, that's what they've done."

"Late in the afternoon, I heard a motor car drive up to the front of the house, and very soon after that, I heard Morel's voice. At first, he seemed to be talking angrily, then he commenced to laugh loudly.

"They've just told him," thought I, "how they found me sleeping back of the hay stack, like a little fool, and how they've spanked me and locked me up. It is funny, isn't it?"

"Pretty soon I heard Mr. Ryder speaking again. He was standing by an open window as he spoke, and every word came to me distinctly.

"Don't bother any more about it tonight, Morel," said he. "I wouldn't try Hyatt again, either. The girl ran away, and, of course, he knows that there's something wrong about it. He's a straight-laced, puritanical chap too, and may be troublesome. I have another parson in mind who'll do the trick, and ask no questions. It will make no difference to him how much the girl kicks. The secret of it is that he owes me money. Now do you understand? His name is Spaulding, and he lives about three miles away, just as you come into Ipswich. You bring your car over here at eight tomorrow morning, and we'll go and get him."

"After that there was a deal of talking, but I could make out nothing tangible from the jumble of words. Also, presently, they shut down the windows, thus cutting off altogether the sound of their conver-

sation. I didn't want to hear any more, anyway. I had heard enough to show me that I was definitely condemned, and that my execution was evidently set for the following morning."

"I have been thinking," interrupted Christopher, "about those two men, Morel and Ryder. I knew that Morel was a villain, but I now think that Ryder is the greater villain of the two. I thought at first that he was simply a hypocritical, dishonest old skinflint. I know now that he is a depraved and black-hearted criminal. He maltreated, starved and robbed you for all the time that you were with him. At the end, he betrayed you, sold you into slavery, and dared to lay cruel hands upon your dear body. Joe, I implore you to tell me where the man lives. I want to see him, and give him just one good right swing to the jaw."

"No, you mustn't, Kit. I shan't tell you where he lives, either. It would do no good, and would get you into trouble. It is out of the power of Silas Ryder to trouble me again. I just want to forget all about him."

"That's more than I can do, Joe, dear."

"Kit," asked Joe, abruptly, "why did Morel want so much to marry me?"

"As if you didn't know," scoffed Christopher. "Just look in the glass, you beautiful humbug, and you'll see at once why he wanted to marry you."

"Well, this isn't going on with my story. It isn't half done, and it is about time to go home. I sat a

long time at my open window all the while thinking, and thinking. The more I thought, the less I wanted to die. I didn't just see how I was going to die, either. I presently began to get very angry with myself for submitting so meekly to all their cruelties, and from that, I commenced to cast about for some means of escape.

"I looked out of the window, which was all of fifteen feet from the ground, and I wondered if it would kill me, should I drop that distance. All at once I remembered several stories I had read, in which the imprisoned heroine makes a rope out of her bed clothes, and descends to the ground with it. I didn't see why I couldn't do the same thing, but I knew that I must wait until it was perfectly dark, and until everybody had gone to bed and was asleep.

"At about seven o'clock, Mrs. Ryder brought me a supper of cold potatoes, bread and tea. When I heard her coming up the stairs, I lay down upon the bed, and pretended that I was asleep. She came to the bed and looked down at me, searchingly. Then she went out of the room, locked the door and descended the stairs. At eight o'clock, Morel drove away from the house with his car, and at nine o'clock, the Ryders went to bed. I waited an hour, then another. I could hear the Ryders snoring away in their chamber, which was not far from my own, and I concluded that the time had come for action.

“I first got together a few of my things, and tied them up in an old red damask table spread, which Mrs. Ryder had loaned me to use as a shawl in cold weather. These things consisted of underwear, some handkerchiefs, a brush and comb, tooth brush and powder and a small leather roll, called a housewife, which Marcia Mercer had given me when I was at the home, and which contained needles, pins, thread, buttons, a pair of good scissors and a small round pocket mirror, the same that I was trying to heliograph with.

“I now drew my bedstead over to the window, making as little noise as possible. Then I took my two sheets, tied them together end to end, and tying one end of the whole securely to the iron footboard of the bedstead, flung the other end out of the window. I put my hat on, leaned out of the window as far as possible, and dropped my bundle to the ground. Then I sat upon the sill, swung my legs around outside of the window, took a firm grip of the sheets, twisted my body about, and let myself down until I dangled in mid-air. I felt myself to be in a ticklish position. The sheets were old and rotten, my knots might not hold, and I might get an awful tumble, and break a leg or something. However, they did hold, and I soon reached the ground in safety. I was astonished to find what an easy thing it was. Perhaps it wouldn’t have been for some girls, but I have always been quite strong, and it seemed child’s play to hang on to the rope, and let myself down hand under hand.

"Picking up my bundle, I stole across the house lot, climbed a fence and got into a corn field, in which the corn was about knee high. Beyond the corn field there was a pasture, and beyond the pasture, I came to a steep declivity, which led me down to Ryder's pond. This pond was about a quarter mile across, it was very deep, perhaps fifty or sixty feet deep, in some places, and it was called 'Ryder's Pond,' for the reason that Mr. Ryder owned most of the land about it. Mr. Ryder kept an unwieldy, flat-bottomed boat there, which he sometimes used for fishing. I found the boat, pushed it into the water, and rocked it from side to side, until it was half full. Then I threw one oar into the water, flung my hat into the boat, and gave the boat a strong shove, which sent it a long way from land.

"There," said I, "they'll think surely that I'm drowned. They'll think that I started for the other side of the pond, and that the boat upset. They may drag the lake for me for a while, but they'll soon give it over, even though still certain that I'm at the bottom."

"I now made a wide detour and at last struck the road at a point a half mile to the south of the Ryder house and more than a mile south of the village. I had had enough of traveling through fields and woods, where I might walk for hours in a circle, and determined to stick to the main highway. I walked and walked and walked, all through the night I walked.

Several automobiles with glaring headlights passed me, some going one way and some another. Whenever I heard one coming, I climbed the fence and crouched down upon the farther side. I was mortally afraid of Morel, afraid that the Ryders had discovered my escape, and that he was coming after me.

"If he ever puts eyes on me again," thought I, "it will be all up with me. If I could only disguise myself now so that he wouldn't know me. That's the idea, but how can I possibly do it?"

"From that, I commenced to think of different ways of disguising myself, but nothing which I could hit upon seemed feasible or adequate, until at last the idea came to me of changing myself into a boy. The more I thought about it, the more satisfactory such a disguise looked to me. There was, however, a supreme difficulty in the way. I had only three dollars and seventy cents left of the ten dollar gold piece given me by Miss Jamison, and a boy's outfit would cost five or six times that sum. It was a pity, but I must give the scheme up."

CHAPTER XV

THE MAKING OF A BOY SCOUT

"Kit," now asked the girl, apprehensively, "aren't you getting tired of hearing me talk? I've been at it for almost two hours, and I'm afraid I've wearied you."

"Not at all, dear. Your story is the most interesting one I have ever heard. I could listen to you always. Like the Sultan when Scheherezade was telling him her stories, I could listen to you for a thousand and one nights."

"Pooh! you can't make me believe that. This account of my sordid and humdrum existence, it seems to me, must be very tedious and boresome. I must stop now, anyway, as it is time to go home. Tomorrow we will come here again, and I will tell you the rest of my story. I promise you, too, that it will be much more entertaining and thrilling. At the point where I left off, a lot of awful and terrible things began to happen."

"There again you resemble Scheherezade. Every morning when she had finished her story, she would say to the Sultan that it was not nearly so wonderful as the story she proposed to tell him the next morning."

"It's only half past four, anyway," continued he, looking at a small watch which he wore upon his wrist. "We needn't start just yet. I have something important to say to you first."

"What a funny little watch!" she exclaimed, "I never noticed it until now. I don't think you have worn it before. I thought only women wore wrist watches."

"It is sort of silly and effeminate, isn't it? I always thought so until I began to fly. I despised men who wore 'em. For an aviator, though, it's just the thing. You don't have to take your hand from the steering wheel to pull a watch from your pocket. The time is always just in front of your eyes, which is very important and valuable. I wear it today, because I am getting my other watch fixed."

"What is the important thing you have to tell me before we go?"

"It's just this, Joe, sweetheart. I love you very, very dearly, and I want you to be my wife. What do you say, Joe, darling?"

Christopher had arisen, had taken the girl's hand, and was bending over her, eagerly.

"I can't say anything. I think that you are very silly. How do you know, in the first place, that you love me? You have only known me as a girl since last Saturday."

"That makes no difference. I could fall in love

with you in much less time. I think really that I fell in love with you at first sight."

"And when was that? Was it here, last Saturday, when I was still dressed as a boy, and you told me that I was a girl, or was it this afternoon, when you first saw me appear as a young lady?"

"Neither the one time or the other. It was when I first caught a glimpse of you as the lovely lady of the castle. I know, too, that you charmed me as a boy. There was an indefinite something about you which captivated me. Usually, I don't like boys, but you were a wonderful exception. I couldn't get you out of my mind. I was uneasy unless I saw you. I thought it strange that I should feel so toward a boy, but it was really the girl inside of the boy's clothes who made me feel so. I will confess that my affections were divided between the boy, Joe, and the beautiful castle lady. When I found that the two were one, that did the business. Come, Joe, dearest, what do you say? If you will marry me, I promise that you will never have another care, that nothing further shall trouble you."

"I don't know. I must think about it. I can't answer you, anyway, until I have told you the rest of my story. When you hear the extraordinary and terrible things which happened to me, perhaps you won't want to marry me."

"What a ridiculous idea. I know, positively and

beyond question, that you are the best, the purest, the loveliest girl in the world. No matter what has happened to you, no matter what further trials and tribulations you have passed through, I will think so still."

Christopher lifted Joe down from the top of the fallen tree, and came near embracing and kissing her as he did so. When they had driven to her house and were mounting the steps of the porch, Mr. Blackstone's car, with its usual three occupants, coming from the direction of Sumner, passed the house. Felix Morel, as he caught sight of the girl, started forward, leaned out of the car, and looked at her searchingly.

"He saw me, he saw me!" exclaimed the girl, tremulous with fright. "This is the first time he has seen me dressed like a lady. Now he knows who I am. I am dreadfully afraid of him. What shall I do?"

"It isn't necessary to do anything. Just keep to the house, excepting when you are with me. I shall see that he does nothing to injure my love. Let us make an earlier start for the woods tomorrow. Say at half past one, so that you will have ample time to tell the rest of your story. Will you be ready by that time?"

"Of course I will."

Contrary to all precedents set by the female of the species, Joe was indeed ready at the appointed hour. When they had parked the car in the woods, and were

walking down toward their favorite resting place, Christopher put his arm around Joe's waist to steady her.

"I don't seem to be able to keep step with you," she remarked.

"You mustn't try to. When I step with my right, you step with your left, and vice versa. That's the way a fellow and a girl walk when he has his arm about her."

"How did you find that out? You must have had a lot of experience. I see now: you have been walking that way with Maud Holloway."

Saying this, Joe broke away from Christopher's arm, and went forward alone and unassisted. When they had arrived at the Lookout, and Christopher had helped the girl to her seat upon the fallen tree, Joe took up again the narrative of her adventures.

"I left off at the time I was tramping along the highway at night, and trying to put as many miles as possible between me and the Ryder's farm. All night long I walked, with intervals now and then for rest, and at eight o'clock in the morning, found myself passing through a village which was about ten miles distant from the spot where I started. Coming to a bake shop, I went in and bought some buns which I took away with me. The woman who served me looked at me with a glance of sharp distrust, and I was glad to get away from her scrutiny. I was indeed an object of

suspicion. I was carrying a disreputable bundle at the end of a stick, I was dusty and my clothing was soiled, rumpled and covered with grass stains. I resembled Oliver Twist when he was tramping to London.

"I must look like a funny sort of a girl," thought I, "girls don't tramp about the country like this, anyway. No wonder the woman stared. If I were a boy, no one would think anything of it. Oh, if I could only change to a boy, if I could only get hold of some boy's clothes."

"After walking about a mile farther, I came to a large piece of woods which stretched along the road for half a mile, and which extended back from the road ever so far. From the woods, a creek, or large-sized brook, ran down to the road, and flowed under a bridge. Deciding that this was just the place for a breakfast and a long rest, I climbed the fence and passed along the bank of the stream up into the woods. Pretty soon I came to quite a large, deep pool, and I had some trouble in getting around it. Two or three hundred feet beyond it, I found a moss-grown sheltered spot among the trees, and here I sat down and ate my buns, washing them down with water scooped from the brook with my hand. After breakfast, I felt pretty well fagged out and very sleepy, and I determined to take a short nap.

"I fell asleep almost the instant I lay down, and

I slept until well into the afternoon. I would have slept longer, if I had not been awakened by the sound of laughing, shouting and the splashing of water. I looked back to the pool which I had passed, and I saw that eight or ten boys were swimming in it. They had undressed in a thick clump of trees which stood fifty or sixty feet distant from the pool, in my direction, and had stacked their clothing in neat piles upon the ground thereabouts. An inspiration came to me suddenly. Here was the opportunity I had been looking for. Here were the means for making myself into a boy.

"I stole stealthily down stream, keeping the trunks of trees all the while between me and the pool, until I had reached the boy's disrobing place. When I came to look at the clothing, I found nothing but boy scout uniforms. This was better still. Attired as a boy scout, I could go and come as I wanted. A boy scout is thought more of than the ordinary boy. If I tramped through the country, people would think I was taking a hike, or going upon some important mission. I disliked to take the boys' things, but what was I to do? It's a true saying that 'necessity knows no law.' I didn't take my wardrobe all from one pile, either. No, indeed. I had some consideration for my victims. I took a coat from one pile, a vest from another, a pair of knickerbockers from a third, a hat from a fourth, a belt from a fifth, and a four-in-hand tie from a sixth.

In a pocket of the coat, I found a two-bladed jack knife which belonged to James Burdick. At least his name was upon a plate upon the handle.

"If I ever get enough money," thought I, "I'll buy a new suit for myself and send these things back to James Burdick."

"Hugging my stolen apparel under my arm, I crept away silently and stealthily, until I had put several hundred feet between me and the pool. Then I began to run, and I didn't stop running until I had almost traversed the entire wood. At last, entering a closely set piece of undergrowth, I took off my outer clothing, and replaced it with the articles which I had appropriated. I surveyed myself with approval and no small pride. I certainly made up very well as a boy scout. One difficulty still presented itself, and that difficulty was my hair. It was long and thick and glossy, and it made me unhappy to think of cutting it off. Needs must though, when a certain unmentionable personage drives. It had to come off, and the quicker the better.

"I pulled my Stetson hat, which was about two sizes too large for me, well down over my head, then I took my pair of scissors and cut off all the hair which hung below the hat. When I was through, my hair was cut in a straight line around my head at a level half way down my ears. It was indeed a 'Pumpkin Cut,' as you called it. I took my cast-off clothing and the several strands and ropes of long, brown hair, stuffed them

under a log, and covered them well with leaves. Then, I left the woods, made a long detour through the fields, and came to the road again, a mile beyond the point where I had left it. Once upon the highway, I walked just as fast as I possibly could, fearing that the boys would discover their loss, and pursue me. However, my fears were groundless, as I never saw or heard from them again.

"You doubtless think that I did very wrong in stealing the boys' clothing, and of course you are right. Really, though, from the first, I only meant to borrow it, and I fully intended to return it, if I had the opportunity. When I found James Burdick's knife in his coat pocket, I saw the way open for making restitution. I want to tell you now that I have already sent him the garments which I took. Miss Trimbey bought me a new suit the first day I was with her. I at once packed up the boy scout uniform, putting the knife and a dollar bill in the pocket of the coat, and expressed the package to James Burdick at the village which stood near the wood. When I had done this, my conscience was very much relieved.

"When I was trudging along the road, it came to me that my boy's dress was not the only thing necessary to make a real boy of me. If my disguise was to be complete, I must walk like a boy, talk like a boy, and act like one. I at once commenced to imitate a more manly stride, taking longer steps, and putting my

feet down with more decision and emphasis. It struck me, after thinking the matter over at some length, that I could talk best like a boy by using a lot of slang. I had always noticed that boys were very proficient in slang. There was a girl at St. Agnes Home with me, named Stella Anderson, I think I mentioned her before, who was an adept in this sort of language, and I set myself now to remember all the racy words which she used. My memory served me well, and I soon had in my head a large and well-chosen slang vocabulary, which included such choice sentendes as 'I should worry,' 'Search me,' 'What do you know about that?' 'All to the mustard,' 'On the dead,' 'Bet your life,' 'For the love of Pete,' and 'Not on your tintype.' I managed to get some of these expressions into my talk, whenever I spoke with anybody, and I think that I did very well at it, though I might not have said the right thing always at the right time."

"You did use a lot of slang," said Christopher, laughing. "Since you have become a girl, you have dropped it, and I have wondered why. Now I see the reason. It was what the French call 'camouflage,' and it was certainly very clever and effective."

CHAPTER XVI

PANSY PEPPER'S PROPOSAL

"For several days, going always toward the south, I followed the State road or highway which I had first taken. I usually spent the night under a hayrick or haystack in the open fields. There are worse places than a haystack to sleep in. You burrow out a big hole under the lee, side of it, then you wriggle into the hole, and pull the hay over you up to your eyes. You have plenty of fresh air, and sleep like a top, and you wake up in the morning with the birds singing and with a scent of hay in your nose.

"One day I met with a most unlucky happening. A happening which at the time promised to have the most disastrous consequences. It was toward noon, and I came to a farmhouse and a barnyard, the barnyard being alongside the house and directly upon the road. I looked over the barnyard fence, and I saw a spring of water discharged from a lead pipe into a tub. It was near luncheon time, I had some rolls, and I wanted some water to go with them. I carried with me in my pocket a glass pint bottle, and I climbed the fence to fill it.

"As I came toward the tub, I saw that several half-grown chickens were standing upon the rim of the tub, and were craning their necks down to get at the water, the level of which was five or six inches below the top of the tub.

"Those chickens will drown themselves if they don't look out," thought I. "If they once fall in, they never can get out."

"When I arrived at the tub, I was shown to be in the right, for one unlucky chicken had already fallen into the tub, and was feebly struggling in the water. I took him out tenderly, and laid him upon a flat stone in the sun. Very soon his breathing became stronger, he got to his feet, flapped his wings several times to dry them, gave several cheeps and hopped away.

"As I was filling my water bottle, I was startled by a woman's shrill voice. I looked up and saw a slatternly dressed female standing upon the back porch of the house and waving her arms threateningly.

"'What are you doing there, you dirty little tramp?' she cried. 'You go right away out of there, or I'll set the dog on ye.'

"Needing no second invitation to depart, I climbed the fence, walked down the road several hundred feet, and sat down beside the fence under a maple tree to eat my luncheon. Presently, I heard loud talking, and glancing back toward the house, I saw the same woman speaking to a man on the front porch. She was gestic-

ulating angrily and pointing at me, and he was listening to her, and scowling in my direction. In a moment, he left her, came out into the road, and advanced toward me. I ought to have taken to my heels and put a good distance between him and me. I could have done it, too, as I am a pretty good runner I can tell you.

"I had done nothing wrong, however, and so I sat there stupidly, and let him overhaul me. He was a tall, heavy man, his blue jeans trousers were tucked into heavy brogan boots, he wore a gray flannel shirt and a straw hat, he had a big nose, squinty eyes and a goat-like beard. Before I anticipated anything of the sort, he seized me by the coat collar.

"'You murdering, thieving little whelp,' he cried, shaking me, 'what'd ye drown those chickens for?'

"I haven't drowned any chickens, sir," I answered, trembling with fright.

"'Yes, ye did, and now ye go and lie about it. Ye drowned four chickens, that's what ye did.'

"Please, Mister, I didn't drown any chickens. Honest to goodness I didn't. I was getting a drink, and I found one chicken in the water and I took him out, and he hopped away."

"'Say, don't ye go and give me any more of your lies. My missus saw ye drown 'em. I'm going to hev ye put in gaol for it. That's what I'm going to do. Come along now. I'm going to shet ye up, and then I'm going fer the constable.'

"I protested my innocence, I plead and implored, but all to no purpose. He dragged me to the house, where we were joined by the woman, who poured such a flood of vituperation upon me that I was almost deafened by it. They took me around to the rear of the house, and showed me four dead chickens lying upon the porch.

"Now, dern ye, will ye deny it?" asked the farmer.

"They fell in after I had gone away," I cried, "I had nothing to do with it."

"That's a likely tale. Nary a chicken ever fell in before. Besides, the missus saw ye do it."

"That I did, the miserable little devil of a tramp," corroborated the farmer's wife.

"Where'll I put him, while I go for the constable?" asked the farmer.

"Lock him up in the corn crib," answered his wife, "he'll be safe enough in there. I'll keep an eye on it, too, while ye're gone."

"The corn crib stood a short distance back of the house. It was a small, frame building, perched upon four posts, each post being topped with an inverted tin pan as a defensive barrier against rats and mice. The farmer dragged me to the door, opened it, thrust me in, and fastened the door with a hasp and a wooden pin. Then he went to the barn, hitched a horse to a two-seated spring wagon, and drove off after the constable.

"There were spaces of about three-quarters of an inch between the boards of the corn crib, left for venti-

lation, and I could easily see everything that was going on. Pretty soon, a country girl of perhaps sixteen years, a strapping, red-cheeked, comely maiden, came out of the house, and approached the corn crib warily, and with an affectation of aimlessness.

"Boy," she asked in a low tone, "can you hear me?"

"Of course I can, I can see you, too."

"What's your name, boy?"

"Joe," I replied. "Are you the daughter?"

"Yes, I'm Miss Pepper. 'Say, boy, I don't believe you drowned those chickens, but ma thought so first, and she's goin' to stick to it. Pa's gone for Mr. Short, the constable, and if you're goin' to get away, now's your time. I'll take this peg out, and you can do the rest.'

"Miss Pepper went to the door, and tried to pull out the wooden peg, but her father had driven it in with a stone, and it refused to budge.

"Here you, Pansy," suddenly called out her mother from the kitchen door of the house. "What be yew a'doin' of there. You're tryin' to let that little tramp out, that's what you're a'doin'. Come right up here to the house this minute. Quick, I say. Come here this minute."

"The girl turned and reluctantly went toward the house, and with her went my only chance of escape. In a half hour, the farmer returned with the spring wagon. He had with him a tall, lanky, leathery-faced man

who wore a black, rusty, frock coat, and a bowler hat. A tin star upon the lapel of his coat proclaimed him to be the constable. The farmer led the constable to the corn crib, unfastened the door, and delivered me over to the minion of the law. The constable made me mount with him to the back seat of the wagon, Mr. and Mrs. Pepper took the front seat, and we drove away to the office of the Justice of the Peace in the village, two miles distant.

"In a short time, we came to the village, and entered the court room of Squire Philips, the Justice of the Peace, which was situated over a grocery store. Squire Philips was a man of sixty, he was partly bald, wore a straggling growth of gray whiskers, colored with stains of tobacco juice about the mouth, had a pair of keen, gray eyes and wore a pair of brass-rimmed spectacles. The trial or hearing dragged along to a great length. I took no particular interest in it. It was of no use for me to do so. It was a foregone conclusion. Before the hearing commenced, even, I was found guilty and sentenced. Mrs. Pepper swore positively that she saw me throw the chickens into the tub. The Justice questioned me, and I denied it, of course, but that made no difference. Besides everything else, my present life was against me. I could give no satisfactory account of myself. My future indeed looked black.

"The hearing was evidently nearing its end, and

Squire Philips hawed and hemmed, as if preparatory to giving judgment. I was sitting by an open window which commanded a view of the village street down which we had come. All at once there came a fluttering and waving of garments down the middle of the road. I looked more closely and saw Pansy Pepper coming toward me astride of a big man's bicycle. Reaching the Justice's stairway, she flung herself from the wheel, leaving it in the gutter, and mounting the stairs three steps at a time, burst into the court room.

"They's three more chickens drowned," she cried, frantically.

"Order in the Court," thundered the Justice, hammering upon the desk with his mallet. "Wha'd yuh mean by breakin' in here, and interruptin' the proceedin's like that? Wha'd yuh mean by sayin' that three more chickens was drowned?"

"Why don't you see, Squire Philips, that shows the boy didn't drown them four chickens. After pa and ma went away with the boy, I plucked and singed the four chickens which ma gave me, she tellin' me we'd have to make 'em last for ten days. Pretty soon I went down to the barnyard for some more water, and there was three more chickens drowned in the tub. They'd fallen in after ma and pa went away. That shows, of course, that the boy didn't drown them first four chickens."

"Mrs. Pepper," said the Justice, severely, "you

swore that you saw the defendant throw four chickens into the tub. Do you wish to swear to that statement over again?"

"I dunno as I could say eggsactly that I actooaly saw him throw 'em in. I saw him fussin' around there, and after he was gone, I went down to the barnyard, and found the four chickens in the tub."

"Woman!" shouted the Justice in a terrifying voice, 'you swore before that you actooaly saw the boy throw the chickens into the water. Woman, you've committed perjury. Don't you know that I could send you to States prison for that? The case against the prisoner is dismissed. Boy, you can go.'

"I went to the door with alacrity. As I was going out, I turned and looked back at Pansy Pepper. She gave me such a loving glance, that I turned about, ran back, put my arms around her waist and kissed her on the mouth.

"When I had got down to the street, and was passing through the village, I reflected gratefully upon the service which this ingenuous country girl had done me. Without her sympathy and aid, I would have gone to the gaol. Once in gaol, my sex would have been discovered, I would have been the sensation of the hour, my picture would have gone the rounds of the papers, and worse than all else, Morel would have found me again. I shuddered when I thought of the horrible fate which I had escaped, and I often thanked Pansy Pepper from the bottom of my heart.

"When I had walked about a mile beyond the village, I sat down upon the fence to rest, and naturally looked back along the way upon which I had come. I was astonished to perceive again approaching me in the distance, the fluttering skirts and flying ribbons of Pansy Pepper. She came up to me, dismounted from her wheel, and leaned against it.

"'You see,' said she, coyly, 'that you haven't got rid of me yet.'

"Pansy," answered I, in grateful tones, "you are the last person I would want to get rid of. You helped me out of a bad scrape today, and I'll never forget it. You are the only person who has shown me a kindness in many a day. I will always think of you as a friend."

"'But Joe, dear, what are you going away for? Why don't you stick around here? I'm not going to hang around home much longer. Ma and pa are the limit. I think I'll go to Prescott, that's the nearest large town, and get a place in a store or hotel. Say, Joe, if you stay here or at Prescott, we might get married sometime, hey?'

"I'm afraid not, Pansy. You see, I haven't got a cent, and we couldn't live on nothing. I must go somewhere and get employment. If I get something to do, I'll write you."

"'Will you really, Joe, dear, cross your heart, and hope to die?'

"Cross my heart and hope to die. I'll say this too,

Pansy. If I ever marry a girl, it will be you, and I'll never marry any girl but you."

"Wait a minute, Joe," urged Pansy, as I took up my bundle and prepared to depart.

"She turned around from me, bent down and produced something from a secret hiding place.

"Here," continued she, "is something which will help you on your way. I've been two years saving it up. You say you haven't a cent. You can't get along on nothing. You will starve. Please take it."

"She thrust out a five dollar bill toward me, but I motioned it back.

"No, Pansy dear," I replied. "I can't take it. In fact, I don't need it. I was speaking figuratively. I have enough to carry me along until I get something to do. I thank you ever so much, Pansy, and now good-bye, as I have a long way to go, and must be going."

"I waited for Pansy to mount her wheel, but she made no move to do so. She smiled, and puckered up her lips, and I gave her two or three hearty kisses. When I had gone on my way a quarter mile or so, I turned and looked back. She was still leaning upon her wheel, and gazing after me.

"I thought of her for a long time after that, and I had a great feeling of affection for her. She was really a handsome girl for a country girl. She had black eyes, long, heavy, black hair, a beautiful color in her

cheeks, and she had a good figure, though she was somewhat stout. There are few men who wouldn't have been glad to make a conquest of such a girl. It remained for me to win her heart, but I was a girl too, and didn't want it. I made up my mind that I would write her when I had put a good distance between her and me, and tell her that I was a girl, so that she wouldn't bother her heart about me too much, and I did write her so, two or three weeks afterwards. You see, Kit, that your proposal of marriage isn't the only one I've had."

CHAPTER XVII

THE DOCTOR'S ASSISTANT

"I went on for two or three days longer, hoping to reach some large town, a town of four or five thousand inhabitants, where I might find employment as an office boy, an errand boy, or perhaps a messenger boy. I had only a few cents left of my fortune, and I would have to get something to do at once, or starve. Presently I came to such a town. I won't tell you the name of it, for reasons which you will learn later.

"I walked up one street and down another, for an hour or so, and I went into several stores, but all to no purpose. At last, while passing through a wide and pleasant residential street, I discovered something which seemed promising. This was a 'Boy Wanted' cardboard sign, tacked beside the door of a doctor's office. The doctor's name, engraved upon a brass door plate, was Mathew Churchill. His office was in a wing to one side of his residence, and there was a separate porch and pair of steps belonging to his office.

"I went to the office door and rang the bell. Pretty soon, a maid servant let me into the reception room,

and called the doctor. He was a rather tall old gentleman, somewhere between sixty and seventy years of age. He had a clean-shaven face, small, twinkling black eyes and a mop of tousled gray hair. He wore a very large pair of spectacles, and he had a funny way of looking at you over the top of them. I think that he had false teeth, too. They were extraordinarily white and perfect, and now and then, he would wrestle them about in his mouth, as if they didn't fit very well.

“‘Well, boy,’ said he, ‘what do you want?’

“I had wrenched away the ‘Boy Wanted’ sign from beside the front door, and tucked it under my arm. I now produced it.

“I’d like to have the place, sir,” said I.

“‘Yes, yes, I had forgotten about it. I see that you have brought the sign in with you. That looks as if you were quite sure of getting the place, doesn’t it?’

“Surest thing you know,” answered I, thinking it about time to get in a word or two of slang. “You want a boy, and I want a job. Do I get it?”

“Dr. Churchill looked at me over the top of his spectacles, and his teeth seemed to be jumping about.

“‘I don’t know,’ said he, dubiously. ‘You’re a smart sort of a boy. Perhaps you may be too smart. I’ve had boys before who were too smart. What’s your name?’

“Joe.”

“ ‘Joe what?’

“I then gave him the usual account of my birth and bringing up, but withheld the reason for my leaving the Ryders. I thought that he might not ask me for the reason and he didn’t. Neither did he ask me for any references.”

“ ‘Can you write?’ asked he.

“Yes, sir.”

“ ‘Let me see some of your writing,’ he commanded, giving me a pad and a pencil.

“I took the pad and, after thinking a moment, wrote down that old copy book sentence—‘Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party.’

“ ‘Very good,’ he commented, ‘remarkably good. I see that you have had some education. Can you also use the typewriter?’

“Very fairly well, sir.”

“ ‘So much the better. You will probably be quite a help to me. Joe, I think I’ll try you on. I’ll give you a week’s trial, anyway. Your wages will be three dollars a week and your board and lodging. You will eat with the cook. Come with me, and I’ll show you a room where you can bunk.’

“He took me through his office and through his operating room, and opening a door at the far side of the latter, he showed me a small, one-windowed cubby hole, scarcely eight feet across. It contained a little iron bedstead, a chair and a wash-stand. It was a poor



enough chamber, Heaven knows, but it seemed to me, in my friendless condition, like a king's bedroom.

"Now," said the doctor, leading me back into the reception room, "I'll tell you somewhat about your duties. During office hours, you will sit here in the reception room, and receive the patients. As they come in, you will take their names down on paper. When I dismiss a patient from my office, you will introduce another, always being careful to introduce them in the order in which they arrive. I will also require you to go upon errands. I shall send you to the drug store and to other stores for supplies, and I shall also have you deliver prescriptions to my different patients. Perhaps I shall have you typewrite for me, and I may even make use of you when I am performing minor operations. You can stand by, bring me this, that and the other, and hold the different articles ready until I call for them. I suppose you will have no objection to any of this sort of work?"

"Not on your life, doctor. I don't care what the work is, I'll be Johnny on the spot every time."

"I forgot to tell you, Joe, that there is another doctor here part of the time. His name is Kurt, Dr. Aloysius Kurt. He divides the office hours with me. My hours being from nine to ten, mornings, and one to two, afternoons, and his hours being from ten to eleven, mornings, and from two to three, afternoons. He also helps me out with the calls. Of course, you will pay

him the same deference which you pay me. I think that you will get along with him very well. He is a very gentlemanly, well-bred young man, with a good education, and he has had the benefit for two years or so of my experience and reputation. Notwithstanding which, he has several serious faults which I would like to see him correct. He seems to be possessed with an overweening confidence in his own intellect, skill and ability. His conceit is such that he will scarcely ever listen to advice. In fact, I can see that he places his own knowledge even above mine. This is too likely to be the trouble nowadays. Young people think that old people are fools, but old people know that young people are fools. Well, it is time for me to start on my round of calls, and I will leave you. I think that I see Dr. Kurt coming up the street now. I shall tell him about you when I meet him.'

"Dr. Churchill went out, and in a minute or so, Dr. Kurt came in. He was a tall, well-built young man of thirty. He was fashionably dressed, but rather dandified in his appearance. He wore a yellow, silky moustache and a pointed, yellow beard. His hair curled abominably, and there was a pink color in his cheeks.

"'So you are the new boy,' said he, surveying me critically. 'Dr. Churchill has been telling me about you. He also said that he had instructed you about your duties. He seems to think that you are a smart sort

of a lad, and that you will be likely to give satisfaction. I hope that you do. I myself am an easy man to get along with, and I think that we will hit it off very well together. If you perform your duties fully and exactly, you will have no trouble in pleasing me. It will be somewhat difficult with Doctor Churchill, and I feel that I should caution you about him. The doctor, like almost all old people, is rather cranky and crotchety, and though you do your best, you can't help ruffling up his feathers now and then. You will have to humor him as I do. The poor old chap actually thinks that he knows more about pathology and medicine than I. When I tell you that he doesn't keep up with the times, that he has read absolutely nothing of the medical literature of the last ten or twenty years, even you can see the joke of it all. He has a medical library, the most recent volume of which was printed thirty years ago. Such a library is of no value whatever. It is only fit to start fires with. Dr. Churchill scoffs at all the latest and most wonderful discoveries. The germ theory to him is nonsense, and he ridicules the modern use of serums and antitoxins. I am afraid that the poor old doctor has fallen into a rut that he can't get out of. What he did thirty or forty years ago seems good enough for him now. His pathological methods are the same and he gives the same old remedies. I actually think that his whole *materia medica* is limited to calomel, morphine, belladonna, paregoric and castor oil.'

"Thus it was that I entered upon my duties as office boy, errand boy, and general factotum for Dr. Churchill and Doctor Kurt, and thus it was that each of them, seizing upon the first opportunity, gave me his candid opinion of the other. I have been careful to give you these opinions just as they were delivered, so that you can form your own judgment as to the abilities of these two disciples of Aesculapius.

"I soon began to notice some peculiarities about the practice of the two physicians. Doctor Churchill's calls were, for the most part from children and from the aged, and his patients were chiefly of the male sex. Doctor Kurt, on the other hand, had a clientele composed mostly of women and girls. I don't think, either, that they wanted him because they thought him the better physician of the two. They used to call for him at all hours of the day, very many times when there was nothing at all the matter with them, and I was kept busy answering them on the telephone. When I thought how silly and idiotic these women were, I was very angry.

"There was another marked difference in the two men. Dr. Churchill gave his services to rich and poor alike. I have known him to get up at one o'clock in the morning and visit a poor family who could by no possibility pay him one cent. Doctor Kurt would never visit anybody unless he was reasonably sure of getting his fee.

"Dr. Churchill may have had his failings as a physician, but he was unquestionably a most excellent surgeon. He operated in major cases at a hospital near by, but treated all minor cases, such as burns, cuts and fractures, in his own operating room. I used to assist him in a small way in his home practice, running to and fro, fetching instruments from his surgical cabinet, or antiseptic gauze, bandages, court plaster and splints from his closet, and holding these articles ready until they were required. I was at first subject to nausea when I saw him operating, but I soon got over it. I was very much interested in his doings, and I used to watch them with the greatest attention, thinking all the while that the time might come when I would be called upon to use my small knowledge in some sudden emergency.

"I must now tell you of a very unfortunate and humiliating misfortune which happened to me, a misfortune which caused me to pack up my things, and run away from Dr. Churchill's house and from the town with all the speed I was capable of.

"One afternoon, at about four o'clock, both of my employers being absent, I decided to wash my face and neck, and I went for that purpose into a small chamber to one side of the operating room, where there was a lavatory and a looking-glass. I locked the door securely, or thought I did, but the lock was old and worn out, so that the latch would work out of the striker

plate if one turned the knob and rattled the door sufficiently. This, though, I didn't know at the time.

"I removed my coat and vest, pulled my shirt down from my arms and shoulders, and went to work. While I was in the midst of it, I heard the outside door open and close, and a heavy footstep crossing the reception room, the office and the operating room. A hand took hold of the door knob of the lavatory, and, when the door did not open, shook the door vigorously. My wits deserted me, I was paralyzed with apprehension and instead of clapping my coat about me, I stood stock still like the little fool that I was. Presently the door flew wide open, and the glass showed me the figure of Dr. Kurt, standing in the doorway. He could look past me into the mirror, and of course he saw at once that I was a girl.

"'I beg pardon,' said he, and he closed the door and went out.

"I put on my clothing just as fast as I possibly could, as if I were in a great hurry to get somewhere. After I was fully dressed, though, I didn't go anywhere at all. I simply stood by the closed door with a trembling body and a palpitating heart. I was filled with shame and horror. I just couldn't get up courage enough to go out of the room. Finally, though, I became brave enough to open the door a few inches and to look through the aperture. No one was in sight, and not a sound came to my ears. I stole through

the operating room, and looked into the office. Doctor Kurt was sitting at his desk. He appeared calm and unruffled, and I was convinced that he had been waiting patiently for me to come forth from my hiding place.

" 'Come and sit down,' said he, very kindly. 'Take that chair over there, and we'll have a little talk.'

"I crept, with downcast eyes and blushing cheeks, across the room, and sat down opposite him.

" 'I shall not ask you, Joe,' he continued very seriously and gently, 'to give me your reasons for masquerading as a boy. I imagine that you must have very good reasons for it, and I shall take it for granted that you have. For instance, it may be your idea that you stand a better chance of getting employment and supporting yourself. For my part, I see no reason why you should not continue on here as before. My discovery of your innocent deception will make no difference whatever in our relations. Furthermore, I assure you that your secret will be perfectly safe with me. In regard to it I shall be as silent as the grave. I have been much pleased with the way in which you have performed your duties, and I would not like to have you leave us on account of my unfortunate discovery. I want you to put it out of your mind altogether, just as I shall, and continue on here just as if nothing of the kind had occurred. What do you say, Joe, will you stay on with us?'

"I'll try, sir," I answered, in a low and tremulous voice.

"After he had gone out, I pondered the situation deeply. Though I was thoroughly humiliated and ashamed, the place was so good and the work so easy, that I dearly wanted to stay. Dr. Kurt, since his discovery, had been nothing but what was kind and thoughtful. Of course, if he had acted otherwise, I would have left the house at once. I concluded finally that I would make the best of a bad situation, and keep the position for a while longer. I also concluded that I had judged Dr. Kurt wrongly, that he was not the dandy and flirt I had thought him, but a good-hearted fellow and a thorough gentleman.

"I was soon to be undeceived in my estimate of his character. When scarcely twenty-four hours had passed, he commenced to say bold and improper things in my presence, and to take physical liberties with me. He began to call me pet names, such as 'Sweetheart,' 'Sugar Plum,' 'Darling,' 'Chicken' and 'Honey girl'; he used to pinch my arm or cheek as he passed me, he would come behind me, as I sat at the typewriter, and run his fingers through my hair, or tickle my neck. His actions were becoming unbearable, and I decided to leave the place on the next Saturday night, or as soon as I could get my week's wages.

"Saturday noon, things came to a head, and I reached the limit of my patience. He came behind me,

as I sat at the writing desk in the office; with his two hands clapped against my ears, he pulled my head back in order to kiss me. I sprang up, and wrenched myself away from him.

"How dare you insult me like that?" I cried. "You promised to respect my disguise, and to treat me with consideration and kindness. Instead of that, you take advantage of my position, and abuse me."

"I can't help it," he replied, grinning in my face. "It's all your fault. You shouldn't be so infernally handsome. Really, you shouldn't, you know."

"He reached out his arm, and before I knew what he intended, he caught me around the waist, and pulled me close to his breast. He tried to kiss me, but I held my head back, and thrust my fists into his face. We were struggling about the room, when he stumbled over something, and temporarily lost his balance. At that very moment, I gave him a push and he toppled over backward, hit his head against a leg of the table, and lay upon his back, very still and quiet.

"I thought that I had killed him, and I was filled with remorse and fear. He was far from being dead, however, as I discovered when I knelt and examined him. His pulse was regular and his chest rose and fell with his rythmical breathing. Much relieved, I ran to my little cubby hole of a chamber, bundled up my small possessions, and left the house forever. I walked calmly and coolly down the street upon which Doctor

Churchill's office stood, as if no senseless body lay on that office floor. When I reached the Main street, though, I hastened my steps, and soon getting out of the town, again took to the road."

CHAPTER XVIII

A MAN FOR A' THAT

Joe, at this moment, shifted her position upon the fallen tree, and one of her low shoes fell to the ground. Her shapely feet were quite small, and the shoes which Miss Trimbey had bought for her were a size too large. Christopher picked up the shoe, and regarded it with wonder and approval.

"Give me that shoe, Kit," commanded the girl.

Instead of complying with her request, he took her foot in his hand, lovingly, and gently replaced the shoe.

"I would like to do that always," said he. "When we are married, it shall be my especial privilege."

"How silly you are growing! Besides we may not be married at all. I haven't said yet that I'd marry you."

"But you will, Joe, of course. You were to tell me today. How about it, sweetheart?"

"I can't answer that until I have told you everything. I told you so yesterday. I also said that you might not want to marry me when you know everything."

"That is nonsense. Nothing which has happened to you could make the slightest difference. I know you well enough to know that you couldn't by any possibility be anything but what was good and pure and perfect."

"Do you really mean to say, Kit, that you would marry a girl who never had any parents, who hasn't even a name? My family may have been very common and ignorant, they may even have been criminals. You would be taking an awful risk in marrying me."

"Bother your family. I'm not marrying your family or your relatives. All I want is to marry you, you wonderful girl. Answer me, dearest Joe, will you marry me?"

"I'll answer you, when I have finished telling my story. That's final, and you must wait. You mustn't interrupt me again, either. Let me see, where was I? I remember now, I got to that point where I ran away from Doctor Churchill and Doctor Kurt."

"D—n that Doctor Kurt!" exclaimed Christopher, savagely. "I'm going to find him some day and give him what for."

"You mustn't do anything of the kind. It would only make things worse. Besides, you can't ever find him. I haven't told you where he lived. I see that you are inclined to be rash and unreasonable, and I'm glad I didn't tell you the name of his residence."

"I'm not unreasonable, but it makes me horribly jealous to hear of men fussing over you."

"I don't see how you can be jealous, as long as you know that I never gave any of them any encouragement. But I must get on with my history. Two or three days after I ran away from Doctor Churchill's I met with another awful adventure. I think that it was absolutely the most frightful thing that ever happened to me. I don't like to tell about it, but I must. I will say beforehand, though, that it was the last really serious misfortune that I experienced.

"One night at dusk, as I was passing along a lonely road, I came to a dilapidated barn which stood in the middle of a ten acre lot, a hundred feet or so from the highway: Thinking that it might afford me a comfortable sleeping place, I went up to it, and tried the big main doors, but found them padlocked. Going around then to one side of the building, I discovered a small, unlocked door which let me into a cow stable, where I found a dozen cows standing with their heads between stanchions, some of them eating hay, and others chewing the cud. Kit, I do love cows. They have such a peaceful, serene, benevolent look and manner. A narrow passage led from the cow stable into the hay barn, which contained two high piled hay mows, one on each side of a wide, planked driveway. By the dim light which still existed I made out a ladder leaning against a beam at the top of the further hay mow. I climbed it, burrowed a cozy hollow in the sweet smelling hay, and soon fell asleep.

"A very short time afterward, I awakened suddenly. Some men had come into the barn, and it was the sound of their heavy steps and of their voices which had roused me. The light of a lantern which they carried flashed into my drowsy eyes, and raising myself a little, I peered down over the beam at them. There were three of them, and they were absolutely and without exception, the most disreputable, the most degraded and the most villainous looking human beings I had ever seen. Their clothes were in tatters, their shoes full of holes, their hats lacked either a crown or a brim, and not one of them had shaved for a week. They were the very worst kind of tramps, and you couldn't imagine anybody more foul, more umkempt or more bestial.

"They took several wooden pails which were stacked up at one side of the floor, and turning them upside down, used them for stools and a table. Sitting around their improvised table in a circle, they produced from their pockets and from other places of concealment scraps of meat, vegetables, bread, cake and pie and proceeded to feed themselves like veritable animals. After gorging themselves until no single atom of food was left, a black bottle was produced and passed about the board, with an accompaniment of growls and curses, as it was snatched by each in his turn. From the scraps of disjointed and profane talk with which the meal was punctuated, and which I was forced to listen

to, whether I would or not, I learned the names and some of the peculiarities of these gentlemen of the road.

“One of them was called ‘Skinny,’ another ‘Red’ and the third ‘Governor.’ Skinny, justifying his name, was long and lank. He was hook-nosed and sallow, and had ‘crook’ written unmistakably all over him. Red, as you may guess, had red hair, a red, pimply face, and a week’s growth of red whiskers. Red had only one eye which looked out ferociously from under a heavy thatch of red eyebrow, the place where the other eye should have been being merely a red, inflamed streak or splotch. Governor, I think, taking it on the whole, had the most frightful appearance of the three. He was a large, corpulent brute, and must have weighed, at the least, two hundred and fifty pounds. He had a big, blotched face, small, black, pig’s eyes and a huge nose, covered with protuberances. His shirt was open, and his breast was as hairy as that of a bear.

“I was so terrified at the aspect, talk and ways of these three monsters that I burrowed deeper into the hay, in order to shut out all sound and sight of them. I prayed in my heart that they would go away, but they didn’t. On the contrary, it looked as if they had taken up their quarters in the barn for the night. The hay was dry and filled with dust. In delving deeper into it, I had set the dust floating, and it had got into my nostrils.

“Merciful Heavens!” thought I. “I am going to sneeze.

"Oh, how I struggled to fight off that sneeze! I held my breath, I tried to push the sneeze back, but it was all in vain. When it did come, too, it was a great deal louder than it would have been, had I not fought to keep it back. It was perfectly tremendous. As if that weren't enough, the first sneeze was followed by four or five others of equal carrying powers.

"'Wot t'ell was dat?' asked Governor, glancing about the barn.

"'We've got cumpny, and didn't know it,' remarked Skinny.

"'It's some guy up in de loft,' asserted Red. 'Here goes to inwestigate.'

"Saying this, Red went to the ladder and climbed it, with wonderful agility for so heavy a man. Once at the top, he thrust about in the hay with his great hands, and soon catching hold of me, dragged me out of my hiding place and pulled me over to the top of the ladder.

"'Say, mates,' he announced. 'It's a kid, a fourteen or fifteen year kid. It's one of dem 'ere boy scouts.'

"'Bring 'im down 'ere,' commanded Governor. 'Less have a look at 'im. If he's runned away or stolen suthen, p'raps dey's money in it.'

"Red clutched me about the waist, swung me around to the ladder, and brought me down to the floor. In doing this, his hand and arm necessarily came into close contact with different parts of my body.

" 'Say, pals,' he exclaimed, as he set me on the floor in front of him. 'Wot d'y tink? Ye couldn't gess it in a thousand years. Dis here ain't no boy. It's a gal. Dat's what it is. Now wot d'y know 'bout dat?'

" 'No!' exclaimed the Governor, incredulously, as he and Skinny crowded near to look at me.

" 'How do yuh know he's a gal?' asked Skinny.

" 'How'd I know? Don't ye spose I can tell a gal by de feel of her? Holy Moses! ain't I de lucky guy? I climbs a ladder, feels about in de hay, and fetches out a beaut of a sweetheart. Say, dat's goin' some, ain't it?'

"The Governor caught me by the wrist and turned me about, in order to get a better look at me. I can't describe my feelings. Words are of no use. I was sick with horror, and I could scarcely stand.

" 'Say, Guvnor,' cried Red, with an oath, 'you take your hand off her. I found her, and she's my property. She's all mine, dat's wot she is.'

"Yuh mean she's ourn,' corrected Governor, with a threatening look. 'Findin's wi' us has allus been divided. Yuh can't break that rule now.'

" 'Yes I can. We never found a gal before. A gal is different. She's mine, and I'm goin' fer to keep her. Let dat soak inter yer bean.'

" 'Spouse we play a game of freeze-out fer de gal,' suggested Skinny.

" 'I'm on,' agreed Governor, 'dat gives us all a fair chanct.'

" 'No, I won't play no freeze-out. I found her, and findin's is keepin's.'

" 'I sorter gess we'll play fer de gal,' announced Governor, with an ominous look at Red, 'dey's two agin one, an' dat settles it.'

" 'A'right,' agreed Red, reluctantly, after a long moment of consideration. 'I s'pose I'll hev to, but 'taint fair.'

"They left me standing where I was, and sat down again upon their upturned pails. One of the three produced a grimy pack of cards, another took some matches from his pocket, allotted ten matches to each player, and the game was on. Now was my chance. The entrance to the cow stables was only twenty feet away, and I made a dash for it. Skinny jumped up, and ran to intercept me. He had the agility of a wild cat, and caught me, just as I entered the passage.

" 'Bring de pails over here by de door,' he advised, 'dat'll keep her safe, while we're playin'.'

"The pails were moved over in front of the cow stable door, and the game proceeded. Now I had lost all chance of escape, and I believe that I would have killed myself, had I had the means.

" 'God help me, God help me!' I prayed in my heart.

"After about fifteen minutes of play, the matches lay all together upon the bottom of the middle pail, and I knew that the hands they now held would decide the question of whose slave I should be. I stood directly back of the Governor, and I commenced to watch him in a dazed and mechanical way. Presently, I saw him slip a card from his hand, thrust it into the top of his bootleg, draw another card, the ace of spades, from the same place, and insert it dexterously in his hand. I was about to cry out at the fraud, but some instinct within me made me hold my tongue.

"When the cards were laid down, the Governor had the winning hand. With a howl of triumph, he swept the matches up, put them in his pocket, sprang to his feet, and seized me by the wrist.

"'Come on, honey gal,' he commanded, 'we're goin' fer a leetle walk.'

"'Where yuh goin' wid her?' demanded Red.

"'None o' yer bizness. Dis ain't no place fer courtin'. We're goin' where it'll be nice and quiet and respectable. We're goin' on our honeymoon, dat's where we're goin'.'

"He pulled me through the cow stable, and out into the open. I was numb with terror, my legs gave way under me, and I would have sunk to the ground, had it not been for his powerful grip.

"'Now, kid,' said he, when he had dragged me down the wagon track, and we stood in the highway,

'ye needn't be afeared o' me. I ain't goin' fer to hurt yuh. Some folks ain't near so bad as dey looks, and I'm one o' dat kind. I took yuh outen dat barn cos it want no place fer a lady. Dem two pals o' mine are de meanest, low-down varmints dis side o' hell, and I wouldn't trust no female person wid 'em. I'll take yuh down to de turn of de road, and den I'll let yuh go. Come along.'

"My senses were so chilled with fear that I didn't understand what he meant at first. When at last the meaning of his words filtered through my brain, I couldn't believe that he was really in earnest. I stepped along mechanically at his side, alternately filled with joyful hope and with dark despair. When we came to the turn of the road, and passed it, a dozen twinkling lights appeared in the distance.

"'Dere's de village,' announced he, pointing to the lights. 'It ain't more'n a half mile off, and ye can make it in no time. Now git.'

"I went to go, but he still held me.

"'Wait a minute,' he commanded. 'Gimme dat hankercher wot's in yer coat pocket. I want it fer a keepsake.'

"I gave it to him, he released his hold of my arm, and examined the handkerchief. Presently he held it to his nose. I had put some perfume on it at Doctor Churchill's office, and it still retained a faint odor.

"'Why don't yuh git?' he suddenly demanded with a great show of anger.

"I needed no second invitation, but took to my heels, as if the very old Nick were after me. When I had gone a hundred paces or so, I looked back over my shoulder. At that moment, he stuffed the hand-kerchief inside of his shirt, and turning about, went on toward the barn.

"Kit, that big brute of a man had a heart down inside of him somewhere. I think that sometime, a long time ago, perhaps, he had a mother, or a sister, or a wife, or a daughter whom he loved in his brute fashion. Whenever I think of him and of the dandified and elegant Doctor Kurt, I despise and detest the latter all the more."

CHAPTER XIX

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

"I now have to tell you, Kit, about my great adventure. I call it my great adventure, because it was the biggest and best thing that ever happened to me. It was an experience that makes me happy and proud whenever I think of it.

"One day, for some reason or other, perhaps, because I thought that it was the shortest route, I had left the highway for a railroad track, and was walking the ties. At about noon, I came to a deep gorge or ravine, three or four hundred feet wide, which was spanned by a railroad trestle. Before reaching the trestle, I sat down at one side of the right of way to eat my luncheon. There was a board fence there and a row of trees and bushes just beyond the fence which made a cool, shady spot of it.

"While I was eating, two men, one of whom was carrying a large, black Gladstone bag, came upon the trestle from the further end of it, and began to act in a very strange and peculiar manner. They walked half way across the trestle, as if measuring it with

their steps, then, one of them made a chalk mark upon the ties, stood up and drew out his watch. Immediately the other man started to run, with all his speed, toward the end of the trestle from which they had come. When he reached solid ground, he dashed down into the ditch, up the further side of it, climbed the fence, sprinted across an open pasture, climbed another fence, and disappeared within the undergrowth of brush and small evergreens of a wood lot.

"Presently he reappeared, walked in a leisurely way to the railway track, joined his companion who still stood in the middle of the trestle, and the two advanced in my direction. I was filled with curiosity by their peculiar actions, and I resolved to find out, if possible, what they were about. Curiosity is one of woman's chief failings. Curiosity made Eve bite the apple, made Pandora open the box, and Blue Beard's wife unlock the fateful closet. In respect of curiosity, I must confess that I am not one whit behind my sisters. To observe the two men advantageously, and to learn their secret, I climbed the fence, and concealed myself in the bushes upon the farther side of it. They came along the track, went up to the fence, and seated themselves almost in the very spot which I had left, and within a very few feet of my hiding place.

"Both men were dressed well, but plainly, in tweed suits and soft felt hats. One of them wore a moustache with turned-up ends. The other was clean-shaven.

They commenced to talk immediately, and they spoke in German. They spoke so fast that I missed some of the words, but I managed to get the gist of their conversation. They proposed to blow up the trestle with dynamite, and they were planning to blow it up just as a United States troop train was passing over it. Wasn't it lucky that I learned German at St. Agnes Home?

"The train is now due to pass West Cornwall," said the man with the moustache, who seemed to be the leader of the two, "and will be along here in twenty minutes. We must fix everything at once. We have no time to lose. Get the dynamite out, and we'll make a bundle of it."

"The other man opened the bag and took from it at least two dozen sticks of dynamite, which he wired together in a solid and compact bundle.

"Do you think it enough?" asked he.

"Plenty. There's enough giant powder there to blow trestle and train into bits so small you can't find 'em. All we have to do is to make our arrangements perfect, and get the time just right."

"How many feet of fuse are you going to use?"

"Four feet. Four feet of this fuse here burns in just one minute and a quarter. I've timed it half a dozen times. When the train reaches the cross roads down beyond, the engineer whistles. It's just a mile from the cross road to the middle of the trestle,

and the train does it in a minute and a quarter. When the whistle blows, we light the fuse. If we have good luck, we catch the train in the middle of the trestle. After we light the fuse, we have a minute and a quarter to get into the woods. You did it in three quarters of a minute. That puts us on the safe side."

"Suppose the first train that comes isn't the troop train after all. Suppose they send the regular number twenty-two ahead instead of behind the troop train. They told me that the troop train came first, but suppose they change their minds. The whole right of way would be covered with dead women and kids."

"I should worry. We'd have to try again in some other spot, that's all. This isn't the only trestle used by troop trains. How many men did you say this train carried?"

"Let me see. They told me that the train was made up of ten cars, and that each car carried forty men. That makes four hundred men."

"Himmel! what luck, if we could get the whole four hundred at one stroke! What a blow for the fatherland, nicht wahr? Now fix your dynamite cap, and attach your fuse. I expect to hear the whistle any minute. After you fasten your fuse, wire up the end of the stick, so that the fuse won't pull out."

"After they had connected the fuse and the dynamite cap to the sticks of dynamite, they put the bundle into the Gladstone bag, went forward to the middle of

the trestle, and wired the bundle securely and solidly upon the top of one of the stringers, between the ties and under the rail. They then sat down upon the trestle to wait for the locomotive whistle.

"I was trembling with excitement. I had made up my mind to frustrate their murderous plans, but I doubted whether I would be able to go through with it. When I first began to listen to their conversation, it seemed to me that they were talking simply for the fun of it, that the whole thing was a joke. Finally, however, I realized that the two scoundrels were in deadly earnest. I first thought of getting help, but there wasn't a man within sight, and the nearest farm house was a quarter mile away. Before I could even get word to anyone, the trestle would be blown up. I finally realized that if anything were to be done, I must do it myself. The responsibility rested entirely upon me. That was some responsibility for a little boy scout, wasn't it?

"I couldn't do a thing of course, until they lighted the fuse, and after they had lighted the fuse, I would have to wait until they had run to the end of the trestle, crossed the fields, climbed the fences and got into the woods. If I ventured upon the trestle too soon, they would come back, and defeat my efforts. This would give me not much more than half a minute to reach the middle of the trestle, put out the burning fuse, and get off the other end of the trestle before the train overtook me.

"I waited and waited, keyed up to the highest pitch. It seemed to me that the train would never come. At last, the fateful whistle sounded, one of the men touched a lighted match to the fuse, and I saw them both scamper away toward the end of the trestle. I sprang over the fence, and running stooped down within its cover, in order to save as much time as possible, got to the commencement of the trestle, and crouched down beside it. Just as the two villains reached the wood, I sprang up, and raced toward the center of the trestle and the burning fuse.

"Even as I reached it, the rumble of the train behind me smote upon my fearsome ears. I took out my knife, flung myself down upon the ties, put the fuse upon the edge of a tie, and sawed upon it, furiously. It was very tough, and it seemed to me as if it never would come apart. At last, though, it gave way, I flung the burning end into the creek which ran forty feet below, and springing to my feet, raced for the further end of the trestle. Suddenly, I realized that it was too late, and that I never could get there in time. I stopped dead in my tracks and gazed wildly about me. The train was coming at forty miles an hour, and would be upon the trestle in three seconds.

"All at once, I had an inspiration. I ran a dozen feet forward to a spot where an upright came up under the stringer, an upright with two arms or braces. I sat down upon the end of one of the ties, twisted

around and let myself down so that I hung by my hands, threw one leg over a brace, and hauled myself over upon it. This brace or arm was a foot wide, and stood up at an angle of forty-five degrees. I was lying upon my stomach, with my arms around it, and my position was not nearly as uncomfortable as one might think. Hardly had I lengthened myself out upon the brace, before the locomotive of the train thundered by over my head. Then came the ten heavy cars, and the trestle reeled and trembled with their weight. I thought that the cars would never pass, and instead of ten of them there seemed to be fifty. It was a funny thing that during all this stress and constant presence of awful danger I never once felt afraid. I seemed to be galvanized or hypnotized by some strange influence which made me fear proof. I was terribly afraid when I was in the barn with those three tramps, but I wasn't afraid at all under that train. At last the train passed by, and the trestle no longer shook with its impact. Then the noise of it seemed to lessen, as if its speed were slackening, and, all at once, I knew that the train had stopped.

"Very soon there was a heavy patterning of feet upon the trestle, and a dozen men rushed past the spot where I lay hidden.

"'It was hereabouts I saw him,' declared one of these men. 'He must have fallen into the creek below, but I can't see him.'

"Here I am," cried I. "Here I am, right under the stringer."

"Several men ran to the spot whence my voice came, and two of them reached down, caught me by the arms, pulled me up between the ties, and set me upon my feet. Twenty or thirty men had by that time gathered about me. The conductor, engineer and trainmen of the crew, and a lot of officers and privates of the troops.

"'What were you doing on the tracks?' demanded the conductor, harshly. 'Don't you know that you were trespassing? You've scared the lives out of us, and caused a loss to the railroad company by stopping the train. You ought to be sent up for it, that's what you ought to be.'

"I saw the young whelp ahead of the engine," declared the engineer. "I thought, of course, he'd been knocked off the trestle, or had fallen off. That's why I stopped."

"Come here and I'll show you something," said I.

"I took them back twenty feet or so, and pointed out the bundle of dynamite sticks, with the short piece of fuse attached.

"'Holy Mother of Moses!' exclaimed the engineer. 'It's dynamite, and there's enough there to blow up the whole country. How did it come there? Who did it, boy?'

"Two men. They're Germans, and I think they're

spies. I was hidden behind the fence back there west of the trestle, and heard them plan it. They lighted the fuse the moment you whistled, then they ran along the trestle, crossed the ditch and the fields some way this side of where the train stands, and got into that piece of woods. When they were once in the woods, I ran onto the trestle, and cut the fuse with my knife. I hadn't time then to get off the trestle, so I let myself down between the ties and lay on the brace until the train passed.

"'Holy cat!' exclaimed the engineer, a rough, but kindly sort of man, 'this little chap has saved the trestle, and the train and kept four hundred people from being killed. And he don't make no more of it than nothing at all. He tells about it as if 'twas all in the regular day's work. I've always laughed at these here boy scouts, but I'll never laugh at 'em no more, so help me.'

"With that they all crowded about me, shook my hand, patted me on the back, and said all kinds of fine things about me. I was proud of it, of course, but they made so much of it, that I blushed a deep red and was very much embarrassed. They seemed to think that it was something very wonderful that I had done, whereas, it was nothing of the kind. It was really quite easy and simple.

"'You say,' said one of the officers, a captain I think he was, 'that the two men went into those woods. Do you think they are still there? We ought to give them a run, you know.'

"I looked over toward the woods. At that moment, I saw the two Germans swiftly climbing a hill on the far side of the woods.

"There they are now," I cried, excitedly. "Oh, can't you catch them? Oh, do something."

"You bet we will, sonny. Conductor, tell me something. Isn't there a road ahead of us, crossing the railway, like the road we passed a mile back?"

"Yes, there's a cross road a half a mile ahead."

"Is there a road connecting these two roads, somewhere up beyond the spot where those rascals are running?"

"Yes, there's a state highway a mile beyond them, by which you can get from one road to the other."

"That's good. Sergeant Brown, get eight motor-cycles from the train. Have four men go by one road and four by the other. When you get to the state highway, you can head them off. Meanwhile, I'll have twenty men, strung along at intervals, follow them up through the fields."

"The captain's orders were quickly executed. Before five minutes had passed, the men on motor cycles and the men afoot had set out in pursuit of the dynamiters. Whether the men were ever caught, I don't know, as I very rarely saw a newspaper. I hope they were, I'm sure."

"Boy," asked the conductor of the train, "what's your name?"

“Joe MacLaren,” I answered, hitting upon the first name which presented itself.

“‘Where do you live?’

“I gave the name of the village which I had left that morning.

“‘The railroad company will surely wish to reward you for the great service you have performed. I will make a full report of it, when I end my run tonight.’

“Presently, I saw the captain whisper to a non-commissioned officer, who immediately took off his hat, and began to pass it around through the crowd. I knew at once what was on foot. They were taking up a collection for me. It filled me with shame and confusion, and I decided that I wouldn’t have it. Watching my chance, I got past the crowd, reached the end of the trestle, climbed the fence on the side opposite to that taken by the soldiers, and took to my heels across the fields.”

CHAPTER XX

JOE IS DECORATED

At this stage of the proceedings, Christopher arose, stepped in front of Joe and, without saying a word, drew from his vest pocket the French war cross, and pinned it upon the breast of her coat. He then raised his hand in a military salute.

"What is that for?" she asked, "why do you do that?"

"I am giving you the French war cross as a reward for the service which you have rendered in the war against Germany, and in recognition of the great bravery which you displayed in performing that service. You are a hundred times more worthy than I to wear the cross. No one was ever so much entitled to wear the cross as you. Therefore I give it to you."

"Pshaw, Kit, you are making a mountain out of a mole hill. Either that, or you are poking fun at me. I must confess, though, that I would dearly like to have the cross, but more because it came from you, than for any other reason. May I really and truly keep it for my own?"

"You surely may. In fact, there is no better place in the world for it than upon your dear breast."

Joe raised the cross to her lips, and kissed it.

"That is what I think of it," said she.

"Gyp," exclaimed Christopher, addressing the little dog, who sat upon the tree trunk beside his mistress. "I have heard nothing about you. Where do you come into the story?"

Gyp wagged his tail, looked up at his mistress, gave as near an imitation of a laugh as a dog can, and barked several times.

"You just wait, and she'll tell all about me," was evidently what he was trying to say. "I'm coming into the story right along now."

"It's a funny coincidence," remarked Joe, "but, really, I was just going to tell about Gyp. It was a day or two after my adventure with the dynamiters when I first saw him. I was just leaving a village, and he was coming toward it. As the little dog and I neared each other, a big touring car, containing two men and two women, dashed up from behind me, and I just escaped it by jumping to one side. The driver of the car never tried to avoid hitting the dog at all, but drove straight toward him. Gyp, becoming confused, went one way, then another, and finally stood stock still. One of the wheels of the auto struck him and knocked him off the road into the ditch. The men and women in the car laughed loudly, as if they thought

it a very good joke, and the car went on. I have never been so angry with anybody as I was with those heartless people.

"The poor little dog was standing over by the fence, yelping piteously, and holding up his right fore foot. I went over to him, knelt beside him, and feeling of his leg, found that the lower bone of it was broken. It seemed to me to be a plain, simple, square fracture, and, as the doctors say, I decided at once to operate. I had seen Doctor Churchill set a boy's broken arm, and I knew, or thought I knew exactly how to proceed. Lift-
ing the dog over the fence, I tied him to one of the rails with my four-in-hand tie, and then I set out for the village to obtain the necessary supplies.

"At a grocery, I had my pint bottle filled with milk, bought some rolls, and begged an empty one quart berry box. At a drug store, I procured several rolls of antiseptic gauze and two ounces of arnica. When I returned to the spot where I had left the dog, I found him still standing with his paw in the air. I bandaged his leg, which had swollen quite a good deal, with cotton cloth, torn from one of my old shirts, and I soaked the bandage with arnica. Then I gave him some milk in a small tin cup which I carried with me.

"He spent the night with me under a hay stack. In the morning, the swelling of his leg had gone down considerably, and I decided to set the fracture. I took off the bandage, wound his leg over and over and over

with antiseptic gauze, and finally put on the splints, one above and the other beneath the broken place, wrapping a cotton cloth bandage over the whole, and sewing it together securely so that by no chance could it come off. It's an easy matter, anyway, to cure a dog of a broken leg, because he never uses it until it's well."

"Where did you get your splints?" asked Christopher.

"I cut them out of the bottom of the berry box. The wood was quite thin, and I had to use two thicknesses for each splint. When the operation was completed, I took the little dog into the road.

"Go home, doggie," I commanded. "Go home, go home. Do you hear?"

"He looked at me with a regular dog grin, and it was plainly to be seen that he had no intention of going home. I made believe to take up a stone and throw it at him, but he never stirred. Then I did really throw a stone at him, being careful, though, not to hit him. At this, he turned tail and scampered away upon three legs toward the village. When I had gone three or four miles on my way, it being noon time, I sat down by the fence to eat my luncheon. Presently, I heard a scraping noise on the other side of the fence, and in a moment, that same little dog wriggled through under the bottom board, and ran his nose into my hands. He had followed me all the way from the village, keeping hidden on the other side of the fence, until it was too

late to send him back. Wasn't he smart? Of course, I couldn't send him back after that. He had decided to adopt me, and that settled the matter. The next thing was to give him a name. I thought about it for quite a while, and finally decided to call him 'Gyp.' Now I have told you his story, and you know all about him that I know.

"A week or two after I had found Gyp, we arrived at a large village upon the seashore, and here I secured employment at a grocery store, with wages of four dollars a week. I slept on a small cot in a room above the store, and my business was to sweep and dust the store mornings and evenings, and to carry the packages of groceries about town in a basket. It was a good situation, and I liked it very much, but it had one drawback. I had to go into the kitchens with my basket, and I necessarily met a lot of women and girls. Some of the women were sensible enough, but the most of them were too silly for anything. They used to call me all sorts of pet names, and to hug and kiss me. It was an awful bother. One girl, in particular was quite unbearable. She had something to do about a hotel, I think that she was the proprietor's daughter, and I always found her in the hotel kitchen, when I went there. She used to call me 'sweetheart' and 'honey boy,' and never failed to kiss and caress me. She used to invent ways of bringing me to the hotel. She would call up the store a number of times a day, and order some

small ridiculous article, like a cake of soap, a dozen clothes pins, a lamp wick, or a lemon. Wasn't it awful? A man or a real boy might not have minded it, but a girl doesn't want other girls mussing with her."

"It must have been quite annoying for you," asserted Christopher, "but you must recollect that it was mostly your fault, and that the girls were excusable to a great extent. The fact was that you were too outrageously handsome for a boy. I can sympathize deeply with the poor girls."

"Nonsense! I wasn't a bit better looking as a boy, than you are as a man. If they had the chance, they would muss with you, just as they did with me."

"I don't think so. I know that I wouldn't be popular enough. Anyway, I'm certain that I wouldn't like it, and that I wouldn't let 'em."

"Then why did you allow that girl at the hotel to muss with you?"

"I don't understand you. Do I know the girl? What girl are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about Maud Holloway. She was the girl who made herself such a nuisance to me, and this is the village where I worked for the grocery. Now you can understand why I was so vexed with you for taking her about so much."

"I kept my place at the grocery for almost three weeks. Then I had to give it up. One day Mr. Shaw, the proprietor, whose business was increasing, hired

another boy, or rather hired *a* boy. He was a long, lanky, freckle-faced hobbledehoy, about seventeen years old, and I didn't like him at all. Along toward night, I learned that he was going to share my bedroom with me nights and, of course, that settled it. I went to Mr. Shaw, told him that I had to leave, and asked for my wages. He became very angry, and refused to pay me anything at all, on the grounds that I hadn't staid the whole week out.

"That night, Gyp and I slept upon some blankets at the bottom of a wagon box in a shed back of the grocery store. The next morning, I went to Miss Trimbey. I intended to leave East Halford for some nearby village, and I set out early in the morning, with my stick and bundle upon my shoulder. Wasn't it fortunate that I went by the way of Sumner Street? If I had gone by any other way, I wouldn't have seen Miss Trimbey's advertisement, and would never have found the beautiful, lifelong home which she has given me." -

"Neither would I have met the one girl in the world," added Christopher.

"I want to tell you something more about Morel, and something more about the castle. There are some additional facts about the castle which you should know. When I tell you about them, my story is ended. I met Morel upon the very first morning of my stay with Miss Trimbey, and I was much frightened and aston-

ished, because I hadn't known before that he lived here. Wasn't it strange that after all my wanderings, I should bring up at his own home? I had taken Miss Trimbey downtown that morning in her wheel chair, and had wheeled her into the post-office. While we were there, Morel came in, passed within a few feet of me, looked at me casually, and then went about his business. I was terrified at first, but I soon recovered myself when I saw that he didn't recognize me. Why, anyway, should he recognize the ragged kitchen maid of the Ryders' in the trimly dressed boy scout?

"After we had come from the post-office, Miss Trimbey had me wheel her up hill to the castle, meaning to show me the castle and the cliffs. When we came to the narrow road which runs alongside the castle park wall to the cliffs, we were overtaken by Mr. Blackstone in his big touring car. Mr. Blackstone ordered the car stopped, so that he might talk with Miss Trimbey, who is an old friend of his. She spoke to him about me, and he called me over to the car, talked to me very kindly, and gave me a silver dollar. He was very spry and very lively for so old a man, and I thought him the finest old gentleman ever. Why he should have changed so much in so short a time, and why he should hide himself away as he does, I can't imagine. While I was talking with Mr. Blackstone, I stood within a few feet of Morel who, as usual, sat beside his employer. Beyond giving me a transient glance, he paid me no attention whatever.

"A day or two after this, Susan Babbitt asked me to go to the castle with a message to her sister, Martha Babbitt, who worked there. The two women were fabricating some kind of knit garments, and constant communication between them was necessary. I hated to go there, fearing to meet Morel, but I went. I stood a long time outside the big iron gates before I dared enter the grounds. After I had gone up the driveway to the porch and just as I was turning into the path which led to the rear of the house, the big front doors of the castle opened, and Morel came out into the grounds. He looked at me a moment and then turned away. Now I was sure that he didn't know me, and from that time, I have ceased to fear him, and have felt perfectly safe in going to the castle.

"Martha Babbitt, the first time I visited her, none of the men being about, showed me over the castle, and told me about everything which it contained. After that, whenever I came to the place, and I came quite often, I used to wander about the big building by myself, always taking care, however, that none of its male occupants saw me. One day I found a very large phonograph standing in the salon. I picked out a Spanish dance record from a cabinet near by, started the phonograph playing, and of course, I had to dance. A lot of times after that I danced upon the smooth, hardwood floor of the salon to the music of the phonograph.

“One day, when I supposed that Mr. Blackstone with all his men employees had gone out of town, I was practising my favorite amusement. All at once, I heard the sound of Mr. Blackstone’s car, and a moment later, the car itself drew up in front of the porch. I stopped the phonograph at once, and ran into the hall and around the stairway, meaning to get to the kitchen through the dining room. As I opened the dining room door, I was horrified to see Jacob Flint just entering the room from the doorway beyond. He had been asleep somewhere, perhaps, when all the time I had supposed him to be with the rest. Fortunately, he was half seas over, as was very often the case, and didn’t see me. I darted back into the hall and, just as the front door opened, I took refuge in the small closet under the stairway.”

CHAPTER XXI

KIT'S QUESTION ANSWERED

"Footsteps went this way and that, into and out of the library and the dining room, and up and down the stairs. It seemed as if I would never have a chance of getting back to the kitchen. In a little while, someone with a heavy tread, came from the library, crossed the hall, and turned the knob of my closet. The door opened, and I hid myself behind a great coat hanging upon a hook, just as Mr. Blackstone entered the closet. He closed the door and fastened it in some way which I couldn't see, then he reached upward to a shelf, and took down some small object. I heard a click, and, at once, a round spot of light began to play upon the further wainscoting. It rested upon a point some six feet from the floor, and showed me two small discs or buttons. Mr. Blackstone put his finger upon one of them, and immediately, a narrow panel in the wood-work slid back, disclosing a black opening. He stepped through this opening, the panel glided back into place, and I heard his footsteps going toward the rear of the castle.

"I tried the door to the hall, but I couldn't find the fastening, and felt myself forced to wait for Mr. Blackstone's return. In about ten minutes he came back, the panel opened again, he stepped into the closet, closed the panel, unfastened the hall door, and, opening it an inch or two, looked and listened. Finding everything quiet, he went out into the hall, and closed the door. Very soon thereafter, I went out of the closet myself, crept up the stairway, and made my way to the back stairway and to the kitchen.

"Two or three days after that, seeing Mr. Blackstone's car, with Mr. Blackstone, Morel and Barry, pass Miss Trimbey's house, going in the direction of Sumner, and being convinced that they had gone for the day, I set out again for the castle. When I came to the rear door of the building, I found it locked, which was unusual. Martha Babbitt had departed from the castle the day before, but I didn't know it. I looked into one of the kitchen windows, but no one was about, and the place seemed to be in disorder. Finding the window unfastened, I raised the sash, and climbed into the kitchen. My curiosity had again taken hold of me, and I was determined to explore Mr. Blackstone's secret passage.

"When I had entered the stairway closet, I took the electric flash light from the shelf, and quickly located the two push buttons. I pushed the left hand one, but nothing happened. I pressed the other, and

the panel glided back. I walked along the narrow passage toward the rear of the house, and when I had gone about half way, I noticed very minute rays of light coming into the passage, one on the right hand and the other upon the left, about five feet above the floor. Examining this phenomenon with my flashlight, I discovered peep holes, covered with movable wooden slides, the one giving into the dining room and the other into the billiard room. When I came to the two stairways, the one leading up, and the other leading down, I chose the latter, and making my way along the underground rock passage, went up into the smoke house. I unlocked the outer door of the smoke house, opened it a few inches, and looked about the grounds. Then I closed the door, locked it, and put the key in my pocket. I now had an easy way of getting into the castle at my pleasure. Whenever the occupants of the castle were absent, I could use the phonograph and dance to my heart's content.

"I now returned to the stairway which led up to the first floor of the castle. At the foot of the stairway, and to the right of it, as you come down, I discovered a wooden door, which I hadn't seen before. It was locked, and the key was in the lock. I opened this door, and found myself looking into a small, stone-floored chamber, not more than twelve feet across. It was simply furnished with a bedstead, a table, two chairs, and a dressing bureau, and it had a lavatory

and an electric light fixture. In the further wall there was another door. I tried it, but it was locked and the key was gone. As I stood beside it, I could hear a rushing, murmuring sound. I put my ear to the key hole, and there came to me, from down below some place, an echo of whirling and pounding waves. Somewhere below was the ocean.

"I left the room, and shut the door. Whether I locked it or not I don't remember. I rather think that I left it unlocked. Going up to the first floor, and ascending also the stairway which led to the second floor, I found myself in another narrow passage which led me back toward the front of the castle. Coming to what seemed the end of the passage, I hunted about for those magical push buttons. At length I discovered them, I pushed the proper one, the sliding panel went back as usual, the passage was flooded with light, and I found myself gazing into the second floor chamber of the octagonal tower.

"I had now fully satisfied my curiosity in regard to Mr. Blackstone's singular excursion into the hidden labyrinths of the house, and I knew its secret passages and rooms from end to end. I was still curious, though, about another thing. There were seven old trunks in the storeroom at the top of the octagon tower. I had looked into five of them, but the contents of the other two were still a mystery to me. For all I knew, they might contain silks and satins, they might be filled

with jewels, or with gold coins a hundred years old, and, oh horrors, they might be filled with the skeletons of the victims of those blood-thirsty Blackstone buccaneers.

"I ascended the spiral stairways which led from the second to the third story and from the third to the fourth story of the tower. I found the two trunks in question and, with some difficulty, opened them. The first contained articles of no particular interest or value, but the second was filled to the very lid with those treasures which appeal most strongly to the feminine heart. It contained a great quantity of the most beautiful gowns, hats, laces, stockings and shoes, all of which were in the fashion of fifty years ago. Every article or garment was packed or folded neatly, all were in perfect order, and a delicate perfume came from the trunks, as if its fair owner had just filled and closed it.

"These garments had been made for different occasions, for mornings, afternoons and evenings, and all were so beautiful that it was hard for me to decide which I liked best. At length, though, I chose a violet colored silk gown, with a low-necked, sleeveless, tight-fitting waist, and a many flounced skirt which was rather short and worn over narrow hoops. Also, I picked out a hat and some slippers and stockings to match. Of course, you will guess at once that I meant to dress myself out in these beautiful garments, so that I might know how I would look, if I ever came to possess such things myself.

"To make the change in my apparel, I had to go down to a bedroom upon the second floor, a room which contained the necessary dressing bureau and toilet articles. When I had finished attiring myself, I ran down stairs to the first floor, and promenaded up and down before the ceiling-high mirrors of the library and parlor. Changing from a boy scout's uniform to the elegant ball dress of a debutante was some transition, I can tell you. As I looked at the exquisitely robed creature in the glass I could scarcely persuade myself that it was I.

"You probably are saying to yourself that I started the phonograph playing, and that I tried a dance or two in my new clothes. Of course I did. I think that I danced all of an hour. As I turned and whirled, I could catch sight of myself in all the salon's many mirrors. No costume was ever more beautifully fit for dancing. It added to my pleasure to see such an elegantly robed creature constantly before my eyes.

"At last, I felt the necessity of changing back to a boy, and of making my way out of the castle. The grandfather's clock upon the stair landing had boomed out the hour of four, and I knew that Mr. Blackstone and his men would be returning soon. I went up stairs to change, and before changing, as a precaution against surprise, I ran up to the third floor room of the tower, and looked out of the window. That was the time when you saw me first. It was two weeks ago last

Tuesday. You saw me again the following Friday, as I stood in the doorway between the hall and library. Dear me, what a start you gave me. I had no idea that there was another person beside myself in the castle. I just managed to get into the little closet under the stair, and to enter the secret passage, as you came into the hall, and as you opened the closet door.

"I was in the castle, too, dressed as before, in my borrowed plumage, when you were surprised by Morel, Barry and Flint. I think that it was on the Monday following the Friday. You had surprised me, an hour before, just as I was going to the salon for my customary dancing, and I had taken refuge in the stair closet. You will recollect how I pulled you into it at the critical moment, and led you to the safety of the smoke house."

"Yes," assented Christopher, "and I remember, too, how stingy you were of your appearance. You wouldn't let me get a look at you. Also, you slammed the smoke house door in my face, just as I thought I was going to behold you. Now I know why you talked all the time in whispers. You knew, if you used your voice that I would recognize you at once as Joe, the boy scout."

"I confess myself guilty on all counts," answered Joe, laughing, "but what was I to do? I couldn't have you know that I was a girl. The next and last time that we met in the castle was two or three days afterward, when you caught me in the very act of dancing.

After I had run away from you, I had hours of mortifying and vexatious reflection. At first I hoped against hope that you had not recognized me. When I thought, though, that you must have stood in the doorway no end of time looking at me, I was forced to conclude that the end of my deception had come. I had to meet you here the next day, and I anticipated the meeting with fear and trembling. At last you came, and you at once accused me of the awful crime of being a girl. I have come to the end of my story, and that's all."

"There was no crime in your being a girl, but it was a terrible offense for a girl as lovely as you to hide her beauty in the homely garb of a boy scout. And now, Joe, dearest, please remember that you promised to answer my question as soon as your story was finished."

"What was the question?"

"You know well enough, you dear little hypocrite. I asked you if you would marry me."

"And do you really want to marry me, after all that I have told you?"

"I want to marry you all the more, after hearing the story of your life. In all your troubles, in all your hardships, through all your terrifying and astonishing experiences, you have shown yourself a wonderful, a truly good and perfect girl. Joe, darling, do you love me a little bit, and will you marry me?"

"Of course I love you, and of course I'll marry you. I meant to marry you all the time, should you ask me again, after I had told you everything."

Christopher had risen and had come close to her. He put his arm about her shoulders, drew her to him, and gave her willing lips a long and tender kiss. After this, he sat upon the fallen tree by her side, and put his arm around her waist, and she nestled her head upon his shoulder.

After they had sat there for many minutes, they began to take cognizance of external things.

"What time is it, Kit?" asked the girl, suddenly starting up.

"Twenty minutes past five," answered he, after looking at his wrist watch.

"Oh, dear! we will be awfully late. I have never been late before. What will Miss Trimbey say?"

"She won't say anything very terrible, when she learns what I have to tell her. You must remember, Joe, sweetheart, that this is an extraordinary occasion. This moment only comes once really in a person's life, and we have done well to make the most of it."

As the newly engaged pair were driving down the hill toward the girl's home, they met Mr. Blackstone's car which contained the inevitable three men.

"Morel didn't pay any attention to me whatever," declared Joe, when they had passed, "I saw him too, this morning, when I was downtown with Miss Trim-

CHAPTER XXII

KIDNAPPED

Christopher never thought of going to see Joe again that evening. He dearly wanted to, but denied himself the pleasure. Miss Trimbley always went to bed at nine o'clock, and both Joe and Susan were busy ministering to her for some time before and after that event. If he couldn't talk to Joe, he wouldn't talk to anybody else. Therefore he went down to the ocean, and walked up the beach for two miles and back again. Surrounded by the vast, dark loneliness of the sea and of the night, where all was still except the crash and seething of the tide, it was a constant joy to think of the dear girl who was to be his wife.

When he returned to the Inn at nine o'clock, he was informed that someone had called him on the telephone several times.

"It was a woman, and her telephone number is one thirty-seven," added Mr. Holloway, the proprietor. "She wanted you to call her up, as soon as you came in."

Christopher went into the telephone booth, and

called for the number given him. When the connection was made, he found himself talking to Susan Babbitt.

"Oh, Mr. Van Zant," she cried. "Can you come over here at once? Something has happened. We want to see you."

"What is the matter?" he asked, his thoughts of course immediately reverting to Joe.

"Joe has gone."

"Where has she gone? What do you mean?"

"She has disappeared. Oh, do come at once. Miss Trimbey is distracted, and I don't know what to do."

"I'll be over there immediately. Wait a moment. I'll bring my car. We may need it. You may expect me in five minutes, at the furthest."

With an aching heart, and fearing the worst, he rushed out to the hotel garage, and got his car started. In less than the five minutes stipulated, he arrived at Miss Trimbey's house. He was met upon the porch by Susan who at once took him to Miss Trimbey.

"Now tell me all about it," said Christopher, seating himself opposite the old lady, who seemed anxious, careworn and even paler than usual.

"I can't tell it well," she answered, "I'm too nervous and too worried. Susan, you tell him."

"It was this way," went on Susan, obediently. "Our farmer, Mr. Meeker, who supplies us with eggs, milk and vegetables, driving here with his wagon every

morning, hasn't come today. We had to have some eggs, cream and raspberries for breakfast, and Joe said she would go to Farmer Meeker's farm and get them. Miss Trimbey told her not to bother, but Joe insisted. Farmer Meeker lives on this very same street, just out of the village, and just beyond the graveyard. It's only about three quarters of a mile from here, and Joe said she could easily make it and back in an hour. Miss Trimbey has to have her cream and berries for breakfast, and you can't get them fresh in the stores. Joe was bound that Miss Trimbey shouldn't go without them, and so was bent on getting them herself. I gave her a little basket to carry the things with, and she set out for Farmer Meeker's farm at about seven o'clock.

"She should have returned at eight o'clock. When it was half past eight, and she hadn't come, we began to worry, and Miss Trimbey had me telephone Mr. Meeker. You can imagine our amazement and anxiety when we found that she hadn't been there at all. Miss Trimbey at once thought of you, and had me telephone you."

"Did Gyp go with her?" asked Christopher, after a moment's thought.

"Yes, but he came back a half hour ago. He's now in the garage."

"His coming back shows that she went somewhere where he couldn't follow. If something happened to

her, and she still remained in the spot where it happened, he would have stayed with her. Therefore, I don't think that she has been hurt, or shut up. If she went away in a horse vehicle, he would have followed her. If she went in an automobile, he couldn't have done so."

"How fortunate that we sent for you," said Miss Trimbey. "You certainly have a keen reasoning faculty, and I know that you will get to the bottom of the mystery. I already feel very much relieved."

"I propose to begin a search for Joe at once," declared Christopher, "and I'm going to take Gyp with me. Susan, will you bring him around to the car. Now, Miss Trimbey, don't worry. Things will come out all right, never fear. Joe can't be hurt, as I showed you. She's alive and well, and I'm going to find her."

When Christopher went out to his car, Susan had brought Gyp around to the front of the house. When the little dog saw Christopher, he barked joyously several times, and ran ahead of the car, now and then, looking back at the young man, as if asking him to follow.

When Christopher had gone about three quarters of a mile, and was passing the graveyard spoken of by Susan, Gyp went no further but commenced to run around in a circle upon the turf at the right of the road, sniffing the ground, and yelping excitedly. There was a row of big trees on either side of the highway,

and the place was more than ordinarily dark. Christopher stopped his car, took from a pocket in one of the car doors an electric flashlight, and examined the ground carefully. The grass had been beaten down for quite a space, as if by a struggle, and at length, he discovered, lying in the ditch, a small wicker work basket. Furthermore, he found, at the edge of the road, the imprint of automobile tires, big tires with diamond shaped corrugations. It had rained the night before, and the impression was deep and clear.

"This is far enough for the present," thought he. "The next thing is to go to the castle, and see whether the Blackstone car has diamond, non-skid tires. Of course, this is Morel's work, but I must make sure. I might have known that the villain would be up to something, and I should have taken proper precautions. It's my fault, if anything has happened to Joe. I can't forgive myself for not keeping the dear sweetheart out of trouble."

Throwing Joe's basket into the car, and picking up Gyp also, Christopher now returned to Miss Trimbey's house.

"I've found some clues already," said he to the anxious spinster. "I won't say what they are at present, but I am confident that they will lead to the discovery of Joe's whereabouts, and to the recovery of the dear girl. I am going off now again, and I may not come back until after eleven, or half past. I may

have news, but I suppose that both of you will be in bed, and will not want to be disturbed."

"I shall stay up till midnight," declared Susan. "I shall stay up all night, if necessary, and I want to see you, when you return, and hear what you have found. Miss Trimbley, though, must go to bed at once. It is long after her hour, she has worried herself almost into a fit, and I'm afraid she'll have a breakdown, if she don't get a good night's sleep."

Christopher now started up his car again, and drove to Blackstone Castle. Leaving the car in the narrow side road which ran down to the cliffs, he climbed the park wall, and made his way toward the garage, which was to the left of the castle, and stood somewhat back of it. The castle was dark and gloomy, not a light burned in any window of it, and it looked as though it contained no living person.

When he arrived in front of the garage, he found the doors wide open and the big touring car gone.

"It is just as I thought," said he to himself.

He now began to search for some particular object, and presently, he found what he was looking for. It was an old rubber tire, standing in a corner, a non-skid, diamond tire, fully five inches by thirty-six inches.

"It was a tire like that," thought he, "which made the tracks beside the road, near the spot where Joe lost her basket. I know now what has happened to the dear girl, and I know who is responsible for it. They shall

pay for it, if making them pay is the last act of my life."

Christopher went back to his car, and drove down to the village, and out to Farmer Meeker's house. He was fortunate in arriving just as the farmer was about to go to bed, and he learned from him that a big touring car had passed the house, going toward Sumner, at about eight o'clock. It contained three men and a woman. He wasn't sure about the woman, but there was a very much bundled up figure in the tonneau which resembled a woman. He also said that the car looked like Mr. Blackstone's car, but that Mr. Blackstone wasn't in it.

"Why do you want to know about the car?" asked Mr. Meeker. "Has it anything to do with Miss Trimbey's girl who started out to come here, and never showed up?"

"Yes, Miss Trimbey and I think that she has been abducted. I suspect that she was taken away in that car."

Mr. Meeker was a small, colorless, inoffensive man, but he swore horribly under his breath.

"I will ask you to keep the matter a secret," continued Christopher, "as we don't want to have the young lady talked about. For that reason, too, we haven't notified the police yet. Perhaps we'll have to get their help though, if we don't find her in a day or two."

"I hope you do find her, by ginger! I'll say nothing about it, either. I won't even tell my missus."

Christopher now drove his car on toward the village of Sumner. He scanned the roadway all along for marks of the diamond tires, and found them in abundance. There were evidently several sets of these imprints, made by cars both going and coming, so that his chance of getting anywhere by following or tracing them seemed small indeed. At Sumner, he found a lounger upon the tavern steps, who also remembered having seen a large touring car, resembling that of Mr. Blackstone, and containing three men and a woman. According to this man, it had passed at a few minutes after eight o'clock, and had turned into the state highway which led to the city. He drove eight or ten miles further, upon the state road, without getting any information of value. He then came back and explored a number of cross roads, but found no diamond tire marks upon any of them.

Concluding finally that he was accomplishing nothing, he returned to East Halford. As he drove to Miss Trimbley's house, he hoped against hope that Joe had returned during his absence. It was half past eleven, when he came to Miss Trimbley's door, and Susan was upon the porch awaiting him.

"Hasn't she come home yet?" he asked, eagerly.

"No, indeed, and I was foolish enough to think that you might be bringing her with you."

He told her of the inconsiderable clues which he had discovered, and she agreed with him that Joe had been kidnapped by Morel and his two villainous associates.

"Don't tell Miss Trimbey this," said Christopher. "It will scare the poor old lady into a fit. Just tell her that I am progressing exceedingly well, and that I hope to bring Joe back in a day or two at the furthest."

"Oh, what will we do if you can't find her?"

"We'll have to go to the police I suppose. I don't want to call them into it, as long as there's any chance of our finding Joe without them. I can't do anything more tonight, and I'm going to the hotel and going to bed. There'll be little sleep for me tonight, though."

"There'll be little sleep for me, either."

The next morning, after an early breakfast, Christopher drove to the castle, to see if the Blackstone car had yet returned. He could see, looking over the park wall from the highway, that the garage doors were still wide open, and that the big touring car was still absent. He then went again to Miss Trimbey's house, where Susan met him at the door. From the look in Susan's face, he knew that it was useless to ask her if the girl had come back.

"The Blackstone car hasn't returned yet," said he. "That means, of course, that they haven't locked Joe up in the castle. I have an idea that they have taken her to the Ryder farm, which is all of sixty miles away. I'm starting for the Ryders' now."

"But Joe would never tell us where they lived."

"It will be an easy matter for me to find them. I only have to ask the superintendent of the St. Agnes Home at Salem."

Christopher was all of three hours driving to Salem. He had to go through Boston and several large towns, where speed was impossible, and he was stopping continually to inspect the imprints made by diamond tires. At the St. Agnes Home in Salem he learned that the Ryders lived just outside of the village of Rowley. When he came to the Ryder house, he found it locked up tight and fast, and its occupants absent.

"It's just as well," said he. "I'll have a better chance to search the house."

He went to the rear of the building, pried back a window fastening with his knife, raised the sash, and climbed over the sill into the kitchen. He searched every room in the house, including the cellar and the attic. He looked into every closet. He even raised the lids of several trunks. When he got through with the house, he was absolutely certain that Joe wasn't in it.

As he was about to start his engine, a man and a woman drove up to the gate with a horse and buggy. Christopher sprang from his car, and approached them.

"Are you Mr. and Mrs. Ryder?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the man. "What is your business with us?"

"My name is Christopher Van Zant, and I am looking for a young lady about eighteen years of age, whose name is Joe MacLaren. I traced her to the St. Agnes Home for orphan girls at Salem, and they told me that she was with you for two years or so after she left the home."

"What do you want to find her for?" asked Mr. Ryder, warily.

Christopher saw that he had a hard customer to deal with, and at once resolved to be as hard and shrewd as his customer.

"I'll tell you all about it," he answered. "I'll be perfectly frank with you. The fact is that the girl has had some money left her. I'm trying to find her in order to make over the property."

"How much does it amount to?" asked Mr. Ryder, cunningly.

"I'm not at liberty to say, at present. I'll tell you this, though, if I can find her, she'll never have to work again, she can wear silks and satins, and she can drive her own car."

Christopher spoke truly, for he meant himself to do all these things for Joe, when he married her.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Ryder, avariciously.

"Oh, I do hope you will find her," cried Mrs. Ryder. "Joe is a perfectly lovely girl, and she surely deserves such good fortune. I can't tell you how much I thought of her. We always got on so well together, too. We

were really like mother and daughter. She had almost nothing to do here, she had a very happy home with us, but, like all girls, she wanted to go to the city. I have always longed for her to come back, and a home here is always ready for the dear child."

"Then you know nothing about her present whereabouts?" asked Christopher.

"We can't give you her address now," answered the good wife, "but we can soon learn it, and will be only too glad to send it to you, if you leave your address."

Christopher gave a more or less fictitious address, and took leave of the worthy couple. As he drove away, he looked back, and saw that they were talking earnestly and excitedly.

"I know just what they are scheming," thought he. "They are positive that Joe lies at the bottom of the black pond, at the foot of the hill, back of their house, and they are planning to substitute some other girl, and get hold of that precious fortune."

On his homeward journey, he broke a spring, and was forced to idle away three good hours, while it was being repaired at a blacksmith shop. The consequence was that it was after eleven at night, when he arrived at East Halford. Once again, he drove to the castle, and again he found the garage doors open and the garage empty. Before going to his hotel, he called at Miss Trimbley's house, and told Susan of the poor success of his expedition.

"If we don't find her tomorrow," said he, "we will have to notify the police. "Perhaps we should have done so at the very first. Perhaps she is lost forever by our neglecting it. If so, it is my fault, and I will have to take all the blame. I did hate, however, to have people talking and speculating about the girl who was to be my wife. I am going to watch the castle all tomorrow morning. Undoubtedly, those brutes took Joe away in their car, or rather, in Mr. Blackstone's car. By the way, where is Mr. Blackstone all this time? The men haven't come back. Neither has the car. They will have to come back sometime. They may come today, and it is possible that they will bring Joe with them. If they do, I promise that she shall be safe and sound in this house before night. You haven't told me about Miss Trimbey. How is the poor lady?"

"Her health is good, much better than we might expect, but she feels the loss of Joe an awful lot. She sits in her chair, her hands clasping and unclasping, and does nothing else. She looks straight ahead of her, as if she were in a trance, and now and then, tears roll down her cheeks. It's wonderful how much she got to think of Joe in such a short time."

CHAPTER XXIII

HELIOGRAPHING

The next morning, it being a Saturday and a bright, clear day, Christopher drove his car again to the castle. Instead, however, of hiding it under the trees by the side of the north garden wall, he ran it up the cross road, and parked it in the woods. This time he took it much further down into the woods, so that he could get at it easily, should occasion require. When he had gained the spot where he and Joe were wont to meet, he surveyed the scene with a very sad heart. No matter where he chanced to look, some familiar object of the place would bring her dear image before him. Particularly was this so with the fallen tree, upon which she loved to sit. As he gazed at it with tear-dimmed eyes, it almost seemed to him that her graceful form still occupied its accustomed place.

He had brought his field glasses with him, and now and then, he made a long and minute inspection of the castle and the castle grounds. There was not a sign of life about the place, and it is almost needless to say that the garage doors were still open, and that the garage

was still empty. He had been at his station for several hours, and it was between eleven and twelve o'clock. His long, monotonous waiting had made him very weary. He had had little sleep during the two nights just passed, and several times he came near to dozing. All at once, in that intensely quiet landscape, something moved. He concentrated his attention in the direction of that movement, and became aware that a small, round spot of light was dancing up and down upon a stretch of stone garden wall, which was visible above the shrubbery, a few hundred feet to the right and south of the castle.

"That's Joe," he cried, joyously. "It's Joe, and she's heliographing."

He snatched a pencil and a small memorandum book from his pocket, and jotted down the signals as they were made. The signalling was very slow and it was plainly to be seen that the work was that of a beginner. At last the spot of light stopped jiggling up and down, and vanished entirely. Christopher scanned the dots and dashes in his memorandum book, changed them over to letters of the alphabet, and this is what he made of it.

"Locked intower fourth floor rooms since Thursday night
help me Joe."

"The poor little girl!" he exclaimed. "She is strong on the dots and dashes, but weak on spacing. Just one moment, Joe, sweetheart, and I'll answer you."

He ran back through the woods to his car, took the small, round mirror from its bracket on the windshield, and returned to his post of observation. Tilting the mirror in the proper position, he focused the sun's reflection upon the small stretch of stone wall, and commenced to signal. This was his message.

"I'm coming, Joe, dear. Do you understand?"

Shortly thereafter, he saw Joe's round spot of light alternately appear and disappear, and this is what he made of it.

"dot dot dot dot dot dot dot dot."

Everybody knows, of course, that this is the Morse equivalent for a "Yes."

"Joe is locked up in that fourth story room of the tower there," thought Christopher, "and, of course, she is signalling from one of the south windows of the room. In fact, owing to the position of the sun, she couldn't signal from any other but the south windows. The windows are mere slits, and they are fastened immovably. I noticed that when I was in the room. If she came to the front windows, I couldn't see her, but she could probably see me. I'm going to give her a chance, anyway."

He moved to a spot which was as conspicuous as possible, and waved his arms wildly above his head. Then he plunged madly down hill, through the woods. When he reached the highway, he followed it, until he had gained the southern limit of the walled enclosure.

Then he went down alongside the southern wall about half way, climbed the wall, and dodging from tree to tree and from shrub to shrub, came, at last, to the walls of the castle, at a spot immediately under the balcony. As he was crossing the lawn and the gardens, he caught sight of a big, green object, which projected beyond the rear wall of the castle. He looked again more closely, and recognized Mr. Blackstone's big, green touring car. After Joe's abduction, they had run the car to the back of the house, instead of into the garage, thus completely fooling him.

Climbing to the balcony, by means of the ivy and the projections of the brick work, and entering the room through the French windows was an easy matter. He feared that the door leading from the chamber to the corridor was locked, but it wasn't. Stealing along the corridor, with stealthy footsteps, he presently entered the second floor room of the octagonal tower. Someone was moving about below stairs. There seemed to be but one person, and Christopher wondered which one of the three men it was.

He quickly mounted the spiral staircase to the third story, and from the third story, raced up to the fourth. The door of the fourth story room was locked, and the key was in the lock. He turned the key, and flung open the door. The first object which met his gaze was the figure of his beloved girl. She sat upon a trunk, she had a look of happy anticipation on her face, and she was evidently waiting for him.

"Joe," called out Christopher, stretching out his arms.

She sprang up, and rushed into his embrace. He folded her in his arms, and gave her a much stronger hug than he intended.

"Oh, Kit!" she exclaimed, "you are hurting me. No, don't stop. I like it, though it hurts. I never knew how fine it was to be almost smashed by a strong man who loves one."

"Joe, dearest, sweetest girl, I have you at last, and I never want to let you go. Tell me, darling, what they did to you, and how it is that you came here."

"I was going to Farmer Meeker's Thursday night, it was about half past seven, and I had reached the graveyard, just this side of the Meeker farm. An auto came up behind me, but I didn't pay any attention to it. It stopped beside me, and two men whom I recognized as Morel and Flint, sprang out of the car, threw a blanket over my head, and seized me. I cried out with all the power of my lungs, but the blanket muffled my voice completely. I struggled with them with all my strength, and dragged them all over the lot, but it was of no use. They ended by picking me up bodily, and stowing me in the tonneau of the car. Morel sat beside me, and held me, and the car started forward. We went for several miles, and then, by the tilting of the car, I knew that we had turned to the left. In a short time, the car turned again to the left, and

finally, after a run of several miles more, it stopped. They relieved me of the blanket, and I saw that the car stood in front of the castle porch. I screamed again several times, but it is a lonely road, no one was traveling it at that hour, and it would have been just as well had I saved my voice. Morel and Flint dragged me into the castle, and hurried me upstairs. I caught hold of the banisters, and held on with all my strength, but they wrenched me away, and Morel, picking me up, as though I were a child, carried me up the stairs, took me into the octagon tower, and up the two spiral stairways to this room, where he locked me in. He is a very strong man, that Morel, though you wouldn't think it, looking at his slender figure.

"Good night, you beautiful little devil," he called out as he was about to shut the door. "You got away from me twice, but you won't do it the third time. You can't get out of these windows as you did at the Ryders' house, and if you did, you would have a nice little tumble. I'm going to bring a parson here on Saturday, a very fine accomodating parson, who will do just as I tell him. Then we'll be married good and fast, Joe, dear. I know that you wanted to marry me all along, but that sweet little temper of yours always had to get in the way of it. Good night, sweetheart, and pleasant dreams."

"I found some old shawls and wraps in one of the trunks, spread them on the floor, and managed to get

some sleep that night, as I did in fact last night. Three times yesterday and once this morning, Morel brought me up a tray of food. Each time he has given me the benefit of his humorous and sneering talk, and I have been so angry that I could have killed him, had I had something to do it with. I could have taken a club and smashed in his handsome face, with his closely set queer gray eyes, and his smiling mouth with its cruel white teeth. If he had been brutal and abusive, I could have stood it a great deal better. It's strange, but I haven't been much afraid through it all. I had all the time a deep-seated belief that you would come to me, before it was too late. I was looking into my little round mirror, and taking the shine off my nose, when I hit upon the scheme of heliographing you. I broke out that narrow pane of glass over there, and I have been practising with the mirror ever since yesterday morning. When I saw you come to the lookout in the woods this morning, I knew that I was saved. I had to wait, though, until the sun got around far enough, so that I could cast its reflection upon the wall. How did I do? Do you think that I have improved?"

"Improved is no name for it. I gave you one lesson in heliographing, and you have picked it up as if by magic. Joe, you are truly a wonderful girl. As I came upstairs, Joe, I heard someone prowling about on the first floor. The footsteps sounded as if it were one man only. Probably it was Morel. Have you

seen or heard anything of Barry and Flint since you were brought here?"

"Yes, I heard both of them talking with Morel, early yesterday morning. All three seemed to be very angry. They were all in the second floor room of the tower, directly beneath me. Since then I haven't heard or seen anything of Flint or Morel. But Kit, we shouldn't stand here talking. It is about time for Morel to bring me my luncheon. He may come up at any minute. We must go downstairs at once and hide, or else get away from the castle."

"I don't know whether to do as you propose, or to stay here, and knock the daylight out of him. On the whole it may be better to get out of his way, for the present. I can come back later, and give him what's coming to him. While we are about it, I'm going to carry you downstairs. If that beast, Morel, can carry you up, I can carry you down. When I think of his putting his hands upon you, it makes me furious. Never mind, though, he shall pay for everything he has done to you, to the very last farthing. Now then, Joe, sweetheart."

Christopher took Joe up in his arms, as if she had been a feather, she laid her head upon his shoulder, and he carried her down the two flights of stairs to the second floor tower room.

"That's enough," said she. "Put me down, please. Do you know, Kit, I think that, after all, you may be the least little bit stronger than Morel."

"I know that I am. I found it out when I had that tussle with him two weeks ago. Listen, I just heard a footstep. If I'm not mistaken, the gentleman is coming upstairs."

Joe ran to the east side of the room, and pressed her finger upon a spot in the wainscoting, some six feet from the floor. At once a part of the paneling slid back, and in so doing, disclosed a dark and spooky void.

"Come and get in here quickly," commanded she, as she stepped into the dark interior. "He is bringing my luncheon. When he finds out that I'm gone, he'll start something, and it will be fun to watch him."

Christopher obeyed her, Joe shut the panel to a tiny crack, and the two stood in the darkness, listening. Christopher, of course, put his arm around the girl, which made the situation seem much more comfortable. In a few minutes, Morel, carrying a tray of food, came into the room which Christopher and Joe had just left. They heard him mounting the first staircase, and then the second. There ensued a long and ominous silence, which was presently broken by several venomous oaths and by the crash of china. Morel had evidently dropped the tray in his astonishment at finding the chamber vacant, or had dashed it to the floor in his rage.

In a moment, he came rushing down the two flights of stairs, went from the tower room into the corridor,

and from the corridor into the various chambers upon the first floor. By the noise made by the banging of doors and the moving about of furniture, they could tell that he was engaged in a furious search for his escaped prisoner, and they could also measure the progress which he made through the house.

"He seems to have got pretty well toward the back of the house," remarked Christopher. "If we are to leave the castle, now is our time."

"I'll do anything you say, Kit. I don't care what I do, or where I go, as long as I am with you."

They opened the sliding panel, stepped out into the chamber, and closed the panel again. When they had gone through into the corridor, and had come to the top of the hall stairway, they stopped and listened. Morel was still banging things about somewhere to the rear of the building, but there was no other sound.

"I wonder where Barry and Flint are," said Christopher, in a low voice. "If they were in the castle, they would have come to Morel's assistance. Where, also, is Mr. Blackstone? This old rat hole of a castle is truly a mysterious place. It's a puzzle all around, and I give it up."

Silently now they tiptoed down the broad staircase, as silently crossed the big hall, and as silently let themselves out of the massive doors. Thus, according to the poet, Keats, did Madeline and her lover, Porphyro, upon St. Agnes Eve, steal down the stairway of her

kinsmen's castle, and let themselves out into the night.

Christopher took Joe by the hand, and guided her through the clumps of trees and shrubs to the stone wall at the north of the grounds. He lifted her to the top of the wall, then, climbing the wall himself, he jumped to the ground upon the farther side, and lifted her down. All this was rather unnecessary, as the girl was a very strong and agile girl, and could have climbed the wall, and made the jump perfectly well by herself. All men, though, like to consider their sweethearts as creatures more or less helpless and fragile, creatures to be petted and cared for with exceeding tenderness, and most women want to be so considered. So what's the use of finding fault about such a state of things?

Christopher now raced up into the woods, got his car, and brought it down to the road. Joe, meanwhile awaiting him in a clump of trees, near the corner of the Blackstone park wall. In a few minutes, they drove up in front of Miss Trimbey's house, and at that very moment, Susan came from the front door of the house out upon the porch.

"Here's your lost young lady, Susan," announced Christopher.

Joe sprang from the car, met Susan at the gate, and the two embraced and kissed as if they had been parted for years, instead of days. Meanwhile, Christopher had turned his car about, and was evidently proposing to depart. Joe, perceiving this, ran out to the curb.

"Where are you going?" asked she, peremptorily.

"I'm going back to the castle."

"What are you going there for?"

"I'm going to get Morel."

"Nonsense. You mustn't go back there. It's dangerous. Morel has a pistol. I told you about it before. We are safe out of the place. Let well enough alone."

"Joe, I must go. I owe it to you, and to myself. He is alone there, and I can handle him, never fear. I have a heavy score to settle and I'm going to do it."

Joe protested, and commanded, but Kit did something to the engine which produced an awful noise, and which drowned her words. As he was driving away, he looked back. She seemed to be very angry, but it was all make-believe. She was proud of his courage and determination.

CHAPTER XXIV

MR. BLACKSTONE POPS UP

When Christopher arrived at the castle, he drove his car, for the first time, to the south of the grounds. Scaling the wall, he threaded the clumps of shrubbery, climbed to the balcony, and entered the building. Going through the corridors to the head of the hall stairway, he stopped and listened. Save for an occasional footstep, which seemed to come from the dining room, down below, all was silent in the building. He went down the staircase, cautiously, and looked into the dining room. Morel, at that moment was seated at the dining room table, beside him stood a large, russet Gladstone bag, and he was gazing at some papers. Kit silently stole toward him, but Morel heard him, sprang to his feet, and reached toward his hip pocket. Christopher, however, was too quick for him, and grappled with him, before he could get out his pistol.

Round and round the room they went, each striving to get a strangle hold upon the other. Finally, by a lucky chance, Morel was able to force Christopher backward upon the table, where he proceeded to choke

him. Christopher had other views and, by making a supreme effort, wrenched himself from under his antagonist. Back and forth they went again, and the struggle seemed to be very fairly equal. It seemed equal, but it wasn't. All at once, Christopher put into practice a favorite jiu jitsu trick, caught one of Morel's wrists, and twisted it back of him, giving him such a twinge of pain, that he howled aloud, and became comparatively helpless. Christopher then tripped him neatly, so that he fell with his stomach to the floor, with Christopher on top of him. Christopher sat upon the small of his back, still holding Morel's wrist, and giving it now and then an additional twist.

"Young man, do you need any help?"

The voice came from somewhere back of Christopher. He looked over his shoulder, and saw, standing six or eight feet away, an old gentleman, who seemed to have come suddenly from nowhere. His hair was white, and he had a full, white beard and twinkling black eyes.

"Now that you speak of it, a little help wouldn't come amiss," answered Christopher. "If you will fetch me two or three of those curtain ropes, we'll hog tie this thief, as the cow punchers say, and put him out of the way of further mischief."

The old man, who seemed very alert and agile for one of his age, ran to the window, unhooked the curtain ropes, and brought them to Christopher. The

latter, bringing Morel's other arm back of him, held both wrists together while the old gentleman bound them firmly and securely. Christopher twisted himself around and caught hold of the prisoner's legs. Morel thrashed about, and swore fluently, but to no purpose. The old gentleman, who was both strong and adept, slipped a noose around one ankle, wound the rope about the other, and brought the two together. Christopher then arose, and pulled Morel up into a great, heavy, oaken arm-chair, and held him there, while his venerable assistant lashed him to it, by the arms and legs. As Christopher jerked Morel from the floor, the latter saw the old man for the first time. At sight of him, the villain gazed with bulging eyes, and his face turned to a sickly white, as if he saw a dead man walk.

"That will do very well," commented the young man, inspecting the prisoner with satisfaction. "Fast bind, fast find, is a good motto."

"Young man," now spoke the old gentleman. "I never saw you before, but I'd like to know you. I am very much pleased by your manner of operating. Have you any objection to telling me your name?"

"None at all, Mr. Blackstone. First though, we'll go into the hall, out of hearing of this vermin."

They went into the hall, Christopher took a chair beside the front door, where he could keep an eye on Morel, and Mr. Blackstone sat on the window seat, opposite him.

"My name," said Christopher, "is Christopher Van Zant Blackstone."

"Kit Blackstone!" cried the old gentleman. "My nephew, or rather my grand-nephew, by all that's good. Kit, my boy, it surely warms the cockles of my old heart to see you."

Mr. Blackstone jumped up, put his hands upon his nephew's shoulders, and kissed him upon the cheek.

"Of course, I couldn't be expected to know you," he went on. "At the last and only time I ever saw you, you were only about two feet high. Your grandfather, Christopher Blackstone, my brother, if I must say it, was a rather cranky chap, and we didn't get along well together. After he moved to New York, I saw him but once, and he was then upon his death-bed. Your father was already dead at the time, and you had just attained the dimensions which I mentioned. Now, Kit, my dearly beloved nephew, tell me, by all that's good and great, by what lucky chance you managed to appear upon this scene at just this very opportune moment."

"There wasn't any chance about it, Uncle. I came here with a definite purpose and with a serious intent. I had it in my head that you were in some kind of trouble, that crooked work was going on here, and I came on to try and straighten things out."

"But how did you come to imagine any such thing?"

"I wrote you about a month ago, and told you that

I would like to come on here, and make the long visit which you asked me to make last year, and which I couldn't make, on account of the imminence of my departure for France."

"I never received your letter. Yonder rascal in the dining room must have intercepted it."

"Did you get my previous letter from France, telling you about my accident?"

"No, what was the accident?"

"I fell about a hundred feet in my biplane. I'll tell you all about it later. It was your answer to my letter about visiting you which aroused my suspicions. Here it is."

Christopher took a letter from his pocket, and gave it to his uncle. The latter read it aloud.

"Christopher Blackstone, Esquire,

"My dear Nephew :

"I have received your communication of the fifteenth instant, and have noted its contents. I have to say, in regard to your making me a visit, that I am extremely busy just now attending to several pressing matters, and that it would be somewhat inconvenient for me to receive you at the present time. At some future period, however, I hope to have the pleasure of entertaining you.

"Yours very truly,

"Gideon Blackstone."

"I never wrote that letter," declared the old gentleman, scornfully.

"Of course, you didn't. I could see that at once. You were never so short and cold and formal. This letter hasn't your manner, and, furthermore, it isn't in your handwriting. I suspected at once the presence of a goodly-sized Ethiopean in the wood pile, and I determined to come on here, and do a little detective work. When I saw you for the first time, riding in your car with Barry and Morel, I knew that something must be the matter with you. You looked pale about the gills, and you stared straight ahead of you, as if you were in a trance. I lifted my hand and tried to stop your car and have a talk with you, but Barry couldn't see it, and drove straight on. You look as fit as a fiddle today. Whatever was it that ailed you?"

"When did you see me in my car, or when did you think you saw me?"

"It was two weeks ago last Tuesday."

"Then you never saw me at all. At that time, I was languishing in durance vile. I was locked up in the pump house by these three worthy servants of mine, Morel, Barry and Flint. The man you took for me was Jacob Flint, made up with a white wig and beard, and wearing my coat, cap and goggles."

"Great Caesar!" exclaimed Christopher, with astonishment. "Wonders will never cease. That explains a lot of queer things that I was puzzling my head about.

That explains why I never saw Flint in the car, and why I never saw you in the castle. I don't see though how Flint could have kept up his disguise. I don't see why the imposture was not discovered by some of your friends and intimates."

"They never let any of them get near enough. Flint sat up in the car like a figurehead. He never spoke, he never smiled or winked. He was unapproachable and unassailable. The scheme, of course, was to rob me. It wasn't to be any small, halfway robbery, either. They meant to make a clean sweep. I'll tell you the whole story when we have a little more time. I'm going now to telephone deputy sheriff Sproul, down at the village, to come for the prisoners. I'll have him swear in two other husky deputies, because Morel, Barry and Flint are bad men to handle. I forgot to tell you that I have already boxed up Barry and Flint, and figuratively nailed the cover down. After I've telephoned, I'm going to change my linen and shave. Meanwhile you can amuse yourself looking around a bit."

"Are you sure, Uncle, that you have Barry and Flint sufficiently secured? Is there no fear of their escaping?"

"Not a bit of it. Say, Kit, if we didn't let them out, they'd stay where they are till the judgment day."

Mr. Blackstone went into the library and telephoned for two or three minutes.

"It's all right," announced he, after he had joined Christopher. "I got Sheriff Sproul without any trouble. He's going to swear in a big Welshman, named Edwards and a big Irishman, named Connolly. They'll be up here in half an hour, and will take their prisoners to the county jail at Bedford. Under their gentle persuasion, our three rogues will be like sheep led to the slaughter. Now for my toilet."

When the old gentleman had gone upstairs, Christopher went into the dining room, and surveyed his prisoner. Morel had a derisive smile upon his countenance, and maintained an absolute silence. Christopher went close to him, reached down, and drew an automatic pistol from his trouser hip pocket. Then, reaching into his inside coat pockets, he took forth a large, leather bill pocket-book, and several letters and papers.

"You won't need these in the place where you are going," said he.

Christopher's attention was now drawn to the Gladstone bag upon the table. He went over to the table, and opened the bag. It was absolutely jammed with packages of bank notes. He took up one of these packages, and ruffled the end of it with his thumb. The bills were all of large denominations, twenties, fifties and hundreds. It must have contained twenty or thirty thousand dollars. At a conservative estimate, the bag held a half million.

"That is not a bad fortune to begin with," said he

to Morel. "You were doubtless preparing for a get-away, and you were going to lead a pleasant, innocent and simple life. What a pity that I had to interfere with you. I'm awfully sorry, and I hope you won't hold it against me."

It seemed to Christopher that he heard a faint, growling oath from his prisoner, but that couldn't be, for Morel still maintained his smiling passivity. Christopher now went into the hall, seated himself again by the window, and examined the contents of Morel's book. What he found made his eyes widen, and caused him to give an exclamation of wonder and astonishment.

"Holy smoke!" thought he. "Who could have imagined such a thing?"

Some minutes thereafter, his uncle, Gideon, came downstairs, looking very spruce and fit.

"I'm going to forage in the kitchen and pantries for something to eat," declared he. "It may be our last chance for a snack for some hours, as we are going to take our prisoners over to the county jail at Bedford, and deliver them to the sheriff. I'll bring it into the dining room. Meanwhile, you can stay here, and keep a watch on Morel. He's as wily and slippery as a snake, and we can't be too careful."

After a while, Mr. Blackstone brought into the dining room some canned salmon, half a cold chicken, some crackers and cheese and a bottle of light wine. Christopher joined him at the table, and the two made

a satisfactory repast. They offered food to Morel, but his only reply was a disdainful look.

"I must apologize for the state of my culinary department," said the old man, sadly. "I had two girls before these rascals jumped me and locked me up, but they seem to have gone. One of these girls, Martha Babbitt, was a good cook and a very fine woman besides. I shall try to get her back."

They had scarcely finished their meal, when deputy sheriff Sproul and his stout assistants arrived. They had walked to the castle, and had made the trip in double quick time.

"First, we'll get Barry and Flint from their donjon cells," announced the elder Blackstone. "Edwards, you stay here and keep your eye on Morel. Mr. Sproul and Mr. Connolly, you will come with me. Kit, you come along too. I want you to see the lock-up where I keep my prisoners of war."

Mr. Blackstone led his three followers into the stair closet and thence into the secret passage, showing the way with his electric torch. Sproul and Connolly gave exclamations of astonishment.

"Funny old rat alley, isn't it?" asked Mr. Blackstone. "Been here for a hundred years. Father used it for hiding away fugitive slaves, sort of underground railway, you know. Great grandfather used it for less Christian purposes. There's another secret passage on the second floor, and still another underground. I don't

like them. They are uncanny and spooky. I'm going to have them all torn out."

When they came to the stairways, they descended to the underground, rock-walled passage. Mr. Blackstone opened the door at the foot of the stairs, pushed an electric light button, and the whole party filed into the small, square chamber. Mr. Blackstone went to the further door, unlocked it, flung it open, and stepped outside of it, upon the top landing of a stairway.

"Come up here, you fellows," he shouted downward, in a stentorian voice.

Footsteps sounded from far below, and presently, Barry and Flint entered the chamber. Their hair was unkempt, their clothing water soaked and ragged, their hands and faces covered with dirt. Two more disreputable, foul and crest-fallen rogues could not be imagined.

Mr. Sproul handcuffed the two together, and the party ascended the stairway, went along the passage, and came out again into the hall of the castle. Morel was released from the chair to which he was bound, and was also handcuffed. Christopher went around to the rear of the castle, and brought Mr. Blackstone's car to the front porch. The three prisoners and the three officers of the law crowded into the car, and Mr. Sproul took the wheel, it being arranged that Mr. Blackstone and Christopher would follow in Christopher's car. The old gentleman was anxious to see all his three

ex-servants under lock and key, and proposed to drive all the way to the county jail at Bedford, in order to have that satisfaction. At the last moment, Mr. Blackstone went upstairs to fetch certain necessary things which he had forgotten, and Christopher, seizing the opportunity, ran into the library and telephoned Joe, at Miss Trimbey's house.

"Is that you, Joe, dearest?" he asked. "Yes, of course I can recognize your voice. I'd know it among a thousand—Did I get Morel? I certainly did—No, I didn't get a scratch. I had him down, and was sitting on his back, when, suddenly, Mr. Blackstone, as chipper as ever, appeared from nowhere in particular. It seems that he had already captured Barry and Flint, and had them under lock and key. He got deputy Sheriff Sproul and two other constables up from the village. They've handcuffed the three rascals, and are taking them to the county jail at Bedford, seven or eight miles north of East Halford. Mr. Blackstone and I are following in my car.—How long will I be gone? Oh, two or three hours perhaps. When we get back, I'm coming in to see you and tell you all about it. And say, Joe, dearest, I have a piece of news for you. Mr. Blackstone is my uncle, or rather, grand-uncle.—Why didn't I say so before? I'll tell you the reason when I see you. Good-bye, Joe, sweetheart."

As Christopher came into the hall again, his uncle was descending the stairs.

"Kit," said he, "I've decided not to go to Bedford. The road's bad, and it's a hard trip. Sproul and his deputies are plenty able to take care of those devils, and we are not needed. Instead of going to Bedford, I'll see the district attorney on Monday, and acquaint him with the case. Now come into my den, and I'll tell you my story."

After Christopher had sent the car, with Sheriff Sproul and his party upon its way, his uncle took him through the library, and between the heavy portieres at the further end of the library into a small, cosy chamber which was furnished luxuriously in Oriental fashion. The old gentleman produced some very good cigars, the two men seated themselves in easy chairs, and Mr. Blackstone commenced to tell his story.

CHAPTER XXV

JOE DANCES AGAIN

"I began to suspect these rogues about a month ago," said he. "There was a great deal of low-voiced talk between them, which they would break off at my approach. I listened and spied upon them, from my points of vantage in the secret passages, but I could get at nothing tangible. They were always very careful and reticent when they knew that I was in the building. I am confident that these fellows were totally ignorant of the existence of the secret passage and chambers. That's where I had the advantage of them at the wind-up. Morel has been with me only a year, the two others less than that, and they haven't been able to discover the secret mysteries of the house.

"About three and a half weeks ago, things came to a climax. One night, at dinner, they drugged me. When I awoke the next morning, I was lying upon a cot bed in the pump house. The pump house is that square one-storied, brick building, in the rear of the castle. It stands against the park wall, in fact the park wall forms the fourth wall of the pump house. The

building is about twelve feet in diameter, it has two doors, one leading into it from the grounds, the other leading outward to the cliffs. It has no windows, but has a skylight at the apex of its hip roof. Ten or fifteen years ago, it contained a rotary pump and a gas engine, with which I pumped sea water through the castle. When the village of East Halford built a reservoir in the hills above me, and began to supply me with water, I discontinued the use of sea water, and removed the pump and engine from the pump house.

"After I had recovered somewhat from the effects of the drug, I got up and examined my surroundings. Both doors had been locked, of course, and the closed skylight was twelve feet from the floor. I was securely imprisoned, my voice wouldn't carry to any person visiting the cliffs, and there was no chance of escape. My very considerate servants had furnished this bare and desolate apartment with the cot bed aforementioned, with two chairs, a table, a washstand, a dressing bureau and a lamp and some books. Three times a day, they brought me food and water. Barry and Flint usually came with it. One would hold the door, the other bring in the new tray, and remove the old one. To all my protests, entreaties and threats, they opposed a surly and stubborn silence.

"I was a prisoner in that uncomfortable and solitary hole for something over three weeks, or until yesterday morning. I spent the time pacing up and down the

floor like a caged animal, or lying upon the cot, thinking and planning. Strangely, I didn't once lose my courage, but as the time went on, my desire for vengeance grew and grew. Yesterday morning, after breakfast, I was walking up and down as usual, and, as usual, I tried, mechanically, the knobs of the two doors. To my astonishment, I found the outside door unlocked. I flung it open, and free once more, stepped out into the sunshine of the cliffs. Without standing upon the order of my going, I at once struck out for the north-east corner of the park wall, meaning to get to the village, and safety.

"When I had gone a few steps, I saw Morel and Barry come around the corner of the wall ahead of me. Barry carried a thick cane, and the two men advanced toward me threateningly. I turned to retrace my steps, and beheld Jacob Flint, also with a heavy stick in his hand, coming to meet me from the other corner of the wall. They had caught me in a trap, and I was between two fires. They had let me out of the pump house but only to my destruction. On the one side of me was the park wall, on the other side, not six feet away, was the protecting rail of the Devil's Caldron. As Flint came up to me, I edged over to the railing to get as far as possible from him, and leaned against it. It had been sawed almost through in two places. The moment I touched it, a whole section of it gave way, and I toppled backward, and fell thirty feet or more into the whirling and boiling water.

"I was a good swimmer in my youth, and I can swim fairly well now, but there was no chance of swimming in that raging vortex. All I could do was to hold my breath and trust in Providence. I came to the surface, got a breath of air, and was sucked under again. The tide swept me onward, and presently, everything grew dark, and I guessed that I was being rushed into the cave. A moment later, I felt a shelving rock under me, and partly by digging my nails into it, and partly with the aid of the waves, I managed to crawl up out of the water upon a level platform of rock.

"You may imagine that I was now in a most desperate plight. Far from it. I knew the cave well, having visited it several times, coming to it, though, from above, and not from the Devil's Caldron. I couldn't have chosen a safer or more sheltered spot, and, from that moment, I felt that I was master of the situation. After resting for a while and getting my breath back, I arose, took a match from my waterproof box, lighted it, and went to a certain corner of the cave, where there was a shaft and a stairway, cut out of the solid rock, and leading upward. After ascending the stairway, some twenty-five or thirty feet, I came to a landing and to a door. I unlocked the door with a key upon my key ring, and entered the chamber where I took you and the constables this afternoon. It has been a tradition of the Blackstone family to keep that room

always furnished and ready for an emergency. I was glad now that I had followed the precepts of my ancestors. I lighted the oil stove, removed my clothing, and hung it upon chairs to dry. I then lay down upon my comfortable bed and took a nap.

"When I arose, two or three hours later, it struck me that I heard the sound of voices. I unlocked and opened the door leading to the cave stairway, and listened. Two men were having an argument in the cave below me. I knew their voices at once. The men were Barry and Flint. Flint was accusing Barry of pushing him over the cliffs. By an act of Providence, the two scoundrels had met the fate which they had prepared for me. If Barry had pushed Flint, Morel must have pushed Barry. It made me laugh heartily. It was certainly a most excellent joke.

"That afternoon and evening, I did nothing but wait. I didn't wish for an encounter with Morel, who, I knew, must be somewhere in the house. Neither did I want to leave the castle, as I had a scheme to work out on Barry and Flint. These two scoundrels soon found the stairway, and several times they came up to the landing, and tried to break down the stout oaken door. At midnight, I opened the other door, and stepped out into the secret, stone passage. It was quite a relief for me to find this door unlocked. I always had kept it locked from the outside, with the key in the lock. If I had found it locked, I would have had

to beat it down with one of the steel rails from my bed. Some good angel must have looked after it."

Christopher, thinking of the good angel who had unlocked the door, smiled with amusement.

"Once in the passage," continued his uncle, "I made my way into the hall of the castle, and thence stole back to the pantries and kitchen, ever on the lookout for Morel, and making the least noise possible. Having got together a basket of food and drink, I again returned to my rock hewn citadel. This morning, when Barry and Flint again came up the stairs, and threw themselves against the door, I demanded, in a loud voice, to know who they were.

"It's Barry and Flint," answered Barry, "who are you?"

"I'm Mr. Blackstone, of course," answered I. "Who did you think it was?"

"With that, Flint gave a howl, and fled, clattering down the stairway. He probably thought that I was my own ghost. Barry stood his ground.

"Mr. Blackstone," said he, in a whining voice. "We haven't had a drop of water, or a bit to eat in twenty-four hours. For God's sake, give us something to eat and drink. We're starving and dying of thirst."

"Why, you poor fellows! What a shame!" I answered. "Of course I'll give you something. First, though, I have a trifling request to make myself. I want you to tell me what you, Flint and Morel have

been doing the last month. I want a full confession of the whole scheme. If you lie, ever so little, you don't get anything. What do you say?"

"The two rascals went down the stairway, and held a conference. Presently, they came up again.

"I'll tell you everything, Mr. Blackstone, and I'll tell you the truth, so help me God!" announced Barry.

"He then told me how Morel had gotten up a scheme for putting me out of the way, and robbing me of my whole negotiable property. Flint and he, Barry, had been loath to go into it, but Morel had forced them, by threatening to tell me about certain thefts, of which they were already guilty. After drugging me, and shutting me in the pump house, they went to work in the following manner. Morel would get into my safe, take all my stocks and bonds, and send them to different brokers in New York, ordering them to sell them at the market value, forging my name of course to his letters. As the drafts for the proceeds came back, he forged my name to these also, and the three rogues went to Boston in my car, where he deposited them in a dozen banks to his own credit. As he had opened up the accounts himself, it was an easy and simple matter for him to draw the money out in currency, ten or twenty thousand dollars at a time. Every time they went out in my car, they put a white wig and white whiskers on Flint, dressed him up in my clothes and cap and put my motoring goggles on his nose. They were careful not

to let anybody come near him, or talk to him; the deception succeeded admirably, and kept people from wondering and asking where I was. Two or three days ago, they had concluded the business, had realized on everything possible, and found that they had in their possession about half a million dollars. They now commenced to quarrel about the division of their booty. Barry and Flint wanted each a third, but Morel would allow them only a quarter."

"Wait a minute, Uncle," interrupted Christopher, "I want to show you something."

He went through the library and hall into the dining room, and brought back the russet Gladstone bag.

"I think that you'll find all the money there," said he.

"Kit," remarked the old gentleman, after he had inspected the contents of the bag, "those rascals, after all, did me a favor. Stocks and bonds have been going down like the mischief for the last two weeks, and evidently they sold mine at the top, but I must finish my tale.

"Night before last, the blood-thirsty rascals went out to the cliffs, and sawed the rail of the Devil's Caldron almost through in two places. Yesterday morning, they silently unlocked the cliff side door of the pump house, and when I came out, forced me by their threatening manner to the rail. What happened then, you know. An hour afterward, Morel, with an

air of excitement, came to Barry and Flint, and told them that my body was floating in the Devil's Caldron. The three went out at once to the cliffs to regard the phenomenon."

"I can't see it," declared Flint, who was craning his neck over the edge of the caldron.

"At that moment, Barry, according to his version, which Flint disputes, stumbled, accidentally, against Flint, and Flint pitched over into the abyss.

"Good work!" exclaimed Morel. "It's better to divide the money into two parts than into three. Can you see him?"

"Barry, incautiously bent over the side of the cliff to look.

"It's better, too, not to divide at all," said Morel.

"With that, he gave Barry a violent push, and Barry went to rejoin Flint. After Barry had told his story, I told him that I would put some food and drink on the landing outside of the door, but that he and Flint must first go down into the cave. I heard at once heavy footsteps descending the stairway, but, somehow, they sounded too heavy, and there didn't seem to be enough of them.

"It's no use," said I, "for one of you to wait outside the door. When you have both gone down, I'll put your food outside, and not before."

"Again I heard the tread of descending footsteps, and this time I knew that both men had gone down into

the cave. I put some canned salmon, half a loaf of bread and a pitcher of water outside the door. Then I locked the door, and came up into the castle. I was spying upon Morel, as he sat at the dining room table, with the bag beside him. I was very much astonished at your appearance and sudden attack. This didn't prevent me though from getting to the scene of action as soon as possible. Kit, that's all. I may have omitted some particulars. If you want to know anything further, question me, and I'll answer."

After Gideon Blackstone and his nephew had talked a while longer, the old gentleman assumed a listening attitude.

"I thought I heard some music somewhere," said he.

Christopher arose, and followed by his uncle, went to the portieres, between the den and library, and drew them apart. The music now became quite plain and distinct. The phonograph in the parlor was playing one of Moskowski's Spanish dances. At once, Christopher knew that Joe, thinking the castle empty, had again succumbed to the temptations of the dance.

"What is it? Who is it?" whispered Mr. Blackstone.

"Come with me, and I'll show you," answered Christopher. "Come with me and I'll show you the most beautiful sight in the world. You mustn't make the least noise, though, or we'll lose it all."

They tiptoed through the library and across the hall to the salon door, whch stood ajar. The old man gazed through the narrow aperture with bated breath and with wide eyes.

Joe was dancing as she had never danced before. Her poising, her pirouetting, her sinkings and risings, the swaying of her lithe body and of her shapely arms and hands, her advances and her retreats, her chassaying and her gliding, her tiptoeing and her stamping were the very embodiment of grace and poetry.

Finally, the phonograph ran down, and the girl stood still. Mr. Blackstone flung the door wide open, and advanced toward her with outstretched arms.

"Oh, Jocelyn!" he cried. "My daughter, Jocelyn. Oh, Jocelyn, Jocelyn!"

Joe, though astonished and startled beyond measure, stood passively, while he put his hands upon her shoulders, and gazed longingly into her face.

"She isn't your daughter," declared Christopher, laughing. "She's your granddaughter."

"Of course. What was I thinking of? She's too young to be my daughter. Jocelyn, dear, won't you kiss your poor old granddaddy?"

Joe stood on tiptoe, for Mr. Blackstone was a tall man, and kissed him on the cheek.

"But really, granddaddy, are you my grandfather, and am I truly your granddaughter?"

"Of course you are. I am as certain of it, as I

am of the truth of the Christian religion. Your face and figure prove it. You are the living image of your mother. Here, I'll show you something."

He took out his big, hunting case, gold watch, and opening the lid, showed Jocelyn a painted miniature of a beautiful girl.

"That is a picture of Jocelyn Blackstone, your mother," said he. "The picture would have been exactly the same, had you, instead of your mother, sat for it."

"It does look like me," admitted Jocelyn, softly. "But, granddaddy, I have just thought of something. If you are my granddaddy, then Kit, here, is my second cousin."

"That's right too, Jocelyn, dear. Kit is your second cousin, and he's my grand-nephew. I'm proud, too, to own the relationship."

"I'm glad, though, that he isn't my first cousin," remarked Jocelyn, thoughtlessly.

After she had said this, she blushed rosily, for some reason, best known to herself.

"I think," continued Gideon Blackstone, "that this is the very happiest day of my life. I was a poor old coot, living a miserable life in this great, lonely castle, and in two hours' time, presto, I become possessed of a bully good nephew and a loving and beautiful granddaughter. What could I ask for more? Kit, Jocelyn is my granddaughter, as sure as death, but we must

get all the proofs. We must make the fact uncontested, so that her social position and her claim to my estate, at my death, will be secure. We must set to work at once, and get the proof."

"Nunky, it isn't at all necessary. I have the most complete and absolute proof in my pocket, at this moment."

"Kit, you're a wizard. How on earth did you get hold of it?"

"I took it out of Morel's pocket, when you were upstairs shaving. It's all here in this leather bill book, transcripts from village and city records, clippings from newspapers, sworn statements and copies of entries in the books of orphan asylums. I must tell you that Morel wanted to marry Jocelyn. He found her out, somehow, and immediately concocted a scheme to marry her, put you out of the way and get hold of your fortune. He was very prudent, though, and before he launched upon the sea of matrimony, he made sure of the standing of his prospective bride. In these papers here, you will find the whole record of Jocelyn's life. You will also find proof of her parents' marriage, of their death and of Jocelyn's birth. Her father and mother were killed in a railroad wreck; for a few months after that she was cared for by a good woman, named Mary MacLaren, from her she went to the Salem Orphan Asylum, from the Salem Orphan Asylum, she graduated to the St. Agnes Home for orphan girls,

and at sixteen years of age, she was put out or apprenticed to a farmer and his wife, named Ryder. Here it was that she was approached by Morel. She was too smart for him, though, and escaped from his clutches. The rest of her story Joe will tell you herself at the proper time."

"And do you mean to say that my beloved little granddaughter was compelled to live at asylums, and was forced afterward to work for a living? Jocelyn, my pet and my darling, I shall make it up to you a hundred fold, never fear."

Tears actually coursed down the old man's weather-beaten face, and he again embraced and kissed her, tenderly.

It was now arranged that Jocelyn, should spend the night at Miss Trimbley's house, and that the next day, she should come to live with her grandfather, providing, however, that he could get some servants into the house by that time. Christopher got his car, and brought it around through the iron gates to the front porch. Gideon Blackstone put his granddaughter into the car, kissed her good-bye, and waved his hand affectionately, as the couple drove away.

"Joe, dearest," asked Christopher, as he was about to bid her good-night upon Miss Trimbley's porch, "are you happy?"

"Oh, Kit," answered the girl, "I'm so happy that I can't stand it. I'm so happy that I want to cry. All

my life I have had no father, no mother, no relatives of any kind. Without warning, in one short hour, I become possessed of a lovely old granddaddy and a perfectly splendid big cousin. Added to that, I have a sweetheart, who, sometime, will be my husband. Was there ever a girl so blessed? Oh, Kit, I never knew that a girl could be so happy."

Jocelyn burst into tears, and Christopher, of course, was in duty bound to kiss them away, before he left.

From Miss Trimbey's house, he went to his hotel, packed his valise, paid his bill, and attended to some other necessary matters. His uncle had asked him to make the long deferred visit, and he had accepted the invitation. He had been gone an hour or so, when he finally got back to the castle. He found Mr. Blackstone sitting at the library table, examining a voluminous document.

"Kit, this is my will," said he, "I made it a year ago, when you went to France, and in it, I constituted you my sole heir. Now that I have a granddaughter, I shall have to add a codicil, giving her half of my fortune."

"Let me see the will, Nunk," demanded Christopher.

The old man handed him the document, Christopher glanced over it, for a moment, then deliberately tore it into strips.

"What do you mean, you young rascal, by destroying my will?" bellowed Mr. Blackstone.

"I meant to fix it, so that Jocelyn will have the whole of your property, instead of half. She is your only direct heir, and should have the whole. If you don't leave any will at all, she will get it. I don't need your money, as you know. Besides I want to ask you for something much more valuable."

"Well, what in thunder do you want, you young scamp?"

"I want Jocelyn."

"You want to marry Jocelyn?"

"Of course. Who wouldn't? I've been in love with her since I first saw her, an awfully long time."

"Kit, nothing would please me more. If she's going to marry at all, and such a girl as she is bound to marry, I'd choose you before anyone else. I know darned well that you would make her the best husband that ever lived. What does Jocelyn say about it, though?"

"Jocelyn says 'yes.' "

The two men looked up, and beheld the speaker standing in the hall doorway. She was laughing and blushing at the same time. Christopher held out his arms, and she flew into them.

"I'm awfully glad that you two young folks love each other, and want to marry," said Gideon Blackstone, placing a hand on the shoulder of each. "There is one thing lacking to complete my happiness. I want you to come and live with me. You won't take her away from me, will you, Kit?"

"You better believe I won't, Nunk. Jocelyn has never had a relative. Now that she has found the best grandpop in the world, and you have found the sweetest and loveliest little granddaughter in the universe, I would be a bad, bad man if I tried to separate you. Besides I have never had a home myself, and this castle and its owner look pretty good to me."

"I must explain why I am here," said Jocelyn. "After Kit left me, I went and saw Martha Babbitt, and persuaded her to come back to you, granddaddy. When I told her that Morel and his gang were in jail, she consented right away. She brought my bag up, because I'm going to stay the night, and a good many other nights. She's in the kitchen now getting dinner. You see, I didn't want my new granddaddy to go any longer without a good dinner."

"Do you see, Kit? This little angel granddaughter of mine is no sooner here, than she commences to plan for my comfort. I foresee that I am going to have a pleasant and delightful old age. I have long lived a dreary and lonely life in this great, gloomy barracks. Now everything about it seems bright and cheerful. In Blackstone Castle, for the first time in twenty years, joy, peace and contentment reign supreme, and it's all owing to the coming of our lovely and beautiful little castle lady."

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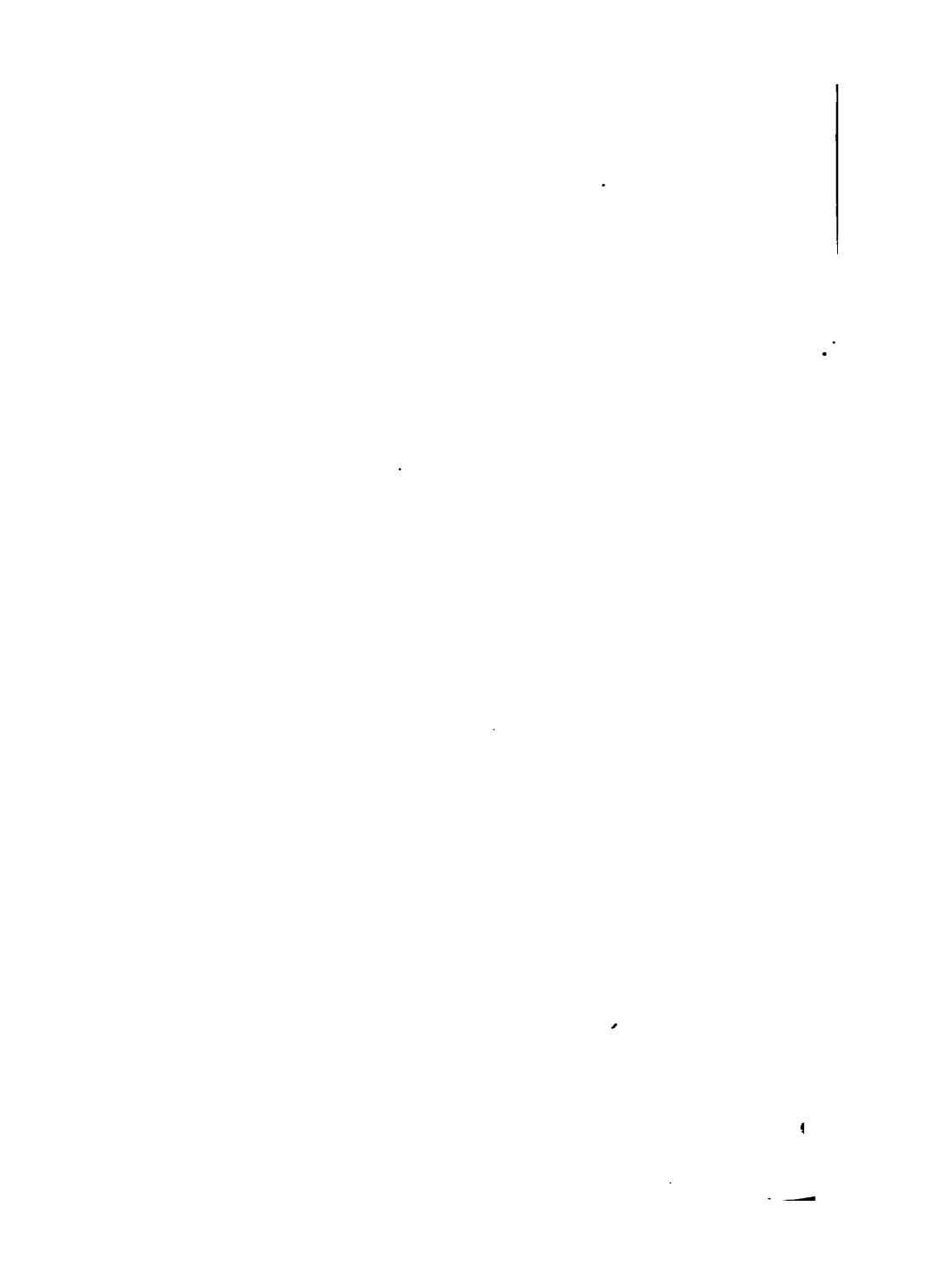
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